

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Enacting and experiencing formative assessment from a sociocultural perspective : a case study in a Year 4 classroom

Thesis

How to cite:

Herron, Sheena Rosemary (2012). Enacting and experiencing formative assessment from a sociocultural perspective : a case study in a Year 4 classroom. EdD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2012 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000c002>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Enacting and experiencing formative assessment
from a sociocultural perspective:
a case study in a Year 4 classroom

Doctorate in Education
Centre for Research in Education

Sheena Rosemary Herron B.Ed., M.A.Ed. (Open)

31 January 2012

Date of Submission: 31 January 2012
Date of Award: 19 April 2012

Abstract

The claim for formative assessment is that it supports significant gains in children's measured achievements. The literature however reveals significant gaps in that there is little practitioner-based research, a lack of theoretical justification for formative assessment practices with sociocultural approaches underrepresented, and younger children neglected. The purpose of the study was to develop and enact a sociocultural pedagogy and explore how formative assessment is understood and enabled, in this approach to teaching and learning. It was carried out in a Northern Ireland primary school, exploring, from a practitioner's perspective, the potential of formative assessment to support young children aged 7-8 years becoming writers. An approach to writing was developed that viewed it as an element in the larger project of narrative construal (Bruner, 1996). Cook and Brown's (1999, see Figure 2 below) proposition of four distinct and co-equal forms of knowledge: explicit, tacit, individual and group, distinguished from knowing – that which emerges in interaction with the social and physical world, was used to understand how in the interplay of knowledge and knowing new knowledge and ways of knowing are generated. The metaphor of formativity (Murphy, 2009) was found helpful to capture the nature of what teachers need to attend to in supporting the process of 'bridging epistemologies' within this 'generative dance'.

Ethnographic methodology was used: this involved a hybrid, mediational case study involving three cases of Year 4 classes to allow dialectical relationships among different planes of mediation to be taken into account (Lave, 1988; Rogoff, 1995). Main sources of data were observation, field notes, informal interviews and reflective journal writing which served as a dialogic tool (Wells, 1999). The findings reveal how 'formativity' emerges in the jointly negotiated reification of the community (Wenger, 1998). It is from this shared resource, that teachers and learners appropriate whatever is formative for them to progress deeper into practice. Reconceptualising writing outside of the narrowly focused schooled

curriculum liberated the children to write in response to their own interest and purposes, making it possible for them to develop identities as writers. The research also revealed that fundamental change in teachers' practice requires associated change in institutional cultures and practices and policies that empower, inspire and treat teachers and children as knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Contents

Abstract	
Title page	
Contents listings	i
List of figures	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
The institutional context	2
Engaging with formative assessment	6
Working with my Y7 class (Summer term 2005)	6
Working with my Y4 class (2005-2006)	7
The classroom as writing workshop	15
Formative assessment in the Northern Ireland (NI) context and in the institutional context	23
Research questions (September 2006)	28
Chapter 2 Views on learning, knowledge and pedagogy: a sociocultural approach	30
Understanding AfL: theory and practice	40
AfL as theorised	40
AfL in Northern Ireland curriculum	53
Developing a sociocultural view of formative assessment	54
Views on Writing	57
Refined research questions	66
Research focus	67
Chapter 3 Research Rationale and Approach	68
Research design	71
Generalisation	73
Case selection	74
Data production	75
Methods of data production	76
Ethical issues	80

Validity	82
Data analysis	84
Beginning the analysis	86
Chapter 4 Data analysis and interpretation: The Acts	88
Act One: Scenes from the Year 4 classroom of 2006/2007	88
Opening up the joint enterprise – a wake-up call	96
Epilogue	118
Act Two: Scenes from the Year 4 classroom of 2007/2008	121
The work of the classroom in relation to AfL as an arena practice	125
Epilogue	136
Act Three: Reflections on my own learning – agency denied	138
Epilogue	146
Chapter 5 Reflections	148
Main findings – the value of the metaphor ‘formativity’	148
Action research and sociocultural methodology	154
Challenges and recommendations	157
Challenges	157
Recommendations	158
Limitations	161
Final reflections	162
References	164
Appendices	

List of figures

Figure 1.1 End of KS2 assessment results for five-year period 1998/1999 to 2002/2003	6
Figure 1.2 Display of our work on area (June 2006)	10
Figure 1.3 Oeuvres creation process	20
Figure 1.4 Poet Tree - when the children shared a poem with the class they wrote the author's name and title of the poem.	27
Figure 2.1 Modes of analysis for a dialectical problematic of practice (Lave, 1988, p.179)	33
Figure 2.2 Generative Dance (Cook and Brown, 1999, p.383)	37
Figure 2.3 A sociocultural model of formative assessment (Pryor and Crossouard 2007, p.15)	55
Figure 4.1 Class brainstorm (31/1/2007)	93
Figure 4.2 Detail, drawn by Stephen from class brainstorm (31/1/2007)	93
Figure 4.3 The suitcases on the left of the display were referenced by Stephen when he added his drawing of a suitcase to our evacuation brainstorm	95
Figure 4.4 Class oeuvre, brainstorming ideas for Writing Journal stories September 2007	122
Figure 4.5 Carol catching a moment to write	123
Figure 4.6 Tracy in role of Class Monitor writes names of children who have volunteered to read their stories on the visual timetable for the day (16/6/2008)	126
Figure 4.7 The small poster at the top of the door is positioned below the clock and reads: We are learning to tell the time	128
Figure 4.8 Visual timetable - with the turtle	131
Figure 4.9 The turtle finds a voice	133

Acknowledgements

While it is my name that appears on the title page, I am conscious of many of the ways in which others are a part of this thesis. I would acknowledge:

The children who worked with me in the classroom, and their parents who have supported that work.

My colleagues and the members of the school Board of Governors who made it possible for me to add research to the shape of my days in school.

Beyond the school, I want to recognise the support of my trade union, and in particular Alastair Donaghy.

I am indebted too to my friends and family – those closest to me who each one played a part in enabling me to persevere.

Submission of the thesis marks the end of nine years' study with The Open University. I offer my sincere thanks to tutors, administrative staff and fellow students. Special thanks go to Dr Janet Soler, very recently appointed my co-supervisor, but who earlier contributed to my thinking through her writing during the first of my master's modules.

It has been a privilege to work with Professor Patricia Murphy, my doctoral supervisor. I have come to know and respect her for her professional passion, and creative energy, her rigorous high standards, unfailing patience and generosity of spirit. As in the best models of formative assessment, she has come alongside me, sharing with me the insights of her theoretical and practical expertise. At times this support has been costly of her time and emotional resources. Thank you, Patricia, you have given so much to challenge and empower me.

Chapter 1: introduction

The research presented in the thesis is an exploration and enactment of a sociocultural pedagogy and how this approach transforms how formative assessment is understood and enabled. It was carried out during a period of three years in a primary school in Northern Ireland. The main purpose was to enhance teaching and learning by exploring, from a practitioner's perspective, the potential of formative assessment to support children's writing. Enacting a sociocultural approach to pedagogy required a fundamental change in practice and in my identity as a teacher. The research was carried out within an institution and not in isolation from the institutional practices and values which in turn were influenced by structures and policies beyond the school. Hence it is necessary to understand something of the history of my practice and learning; and something of the institutional structures, practices and collegial relationships in which the research and practice were enacted. Both help to make sense of my positioning in the school prior to the research and through the period of the study and how this shaped the possibilities for what I could do and be.

The thesis is presented in five chapters. The first chapter sets the scene and details how my interest in formative assessment and children's writing emerged as a focus for research, how I began to understand and enact changes as I explored both aspects with my classes and within the school. The second chapter reviews the literature about assessment for learning and relates it to theories of learning and of knowledge. The theoretical stance adopted in the research is articulated and the conceptual tools that inform the approach to the research and data collection identified. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological stance, the research design and methods and the ethical issues and how these were addressed. It elaborates how a sociocultural approach to practitioner research differs from traditional understandings of action research and its implications for how validity is approached and understood. Chapter 4 presents the findings as a three act drama. Chapter 5 discusses the

main findings, the contribution to knowledge of the thesis, the limitations of the research and areas for future research and recommendations that follow from it.

The institutional context

The school in which the research is located has typical management structures. It is governed by a Board of Governors: made up of nine members, including church representatives (n4), teacher representatives (n1), parent representatives (n2) and education authority representatives (n2), with the principal as secretary. The senior management team (SMT) includes: principal, vice-principal, head of Key Stage 2 (KS2 - children aged 9-11) and a representative of KS1 (children aged 5-8). Each core subject and cross-curricular strand has a co-ordinator with particular subject responsibility. Ad hoc working groups are established when policy initiatives are implemented.

I had been a teacher for 18 years when beginning this research, twelve of these having been in my current school. I had taught mainly older children and from 1994-2000 was class teacher of Y6 children aged 9-10. I was also recognised as having expertise in ICT and music. I was appointed ICT co-ordinator for KS2 in 1997. In 2000 I secured funding to develop school music and disseminate good practice to other schools in the region and was released from class teaching and given responsibility for teaching music throughout the school for a two-year period. I began to study with The Open University (OU) during this project. Although music had been my main subject at college, I wanted to refresh my knowledge and sharpen my skills by studying a music module. At the end of that period I returned to class teaching, this time with Y7 children aged 10-11 years old. I continued my OU study, switching from the Music faculty to Education, and began a Masters in Education studying E842 'Developing Practice in Primary Education'. It was during this module that I first became interested in formative assessment. The three Y7 classes that I taught during the years 2002/2004 and for the first term of 2004/2005 were not mainstream

classes, but classes that were formed of children who were opted out of the Transfer Procedure, the selection examination for entry to secondary schools. They were children on the special needs register, together with some whose parents wanted them to progress to the non-selective secondary school rather than try for a grammar school place.

I was intrigued by the reference in the module study guide to Black and Wiliam's (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) review of research into formative assessment. The study guide reported on key findings from this review: when formative assessment was used student learning in classrooms demonstrably improved, and that the researchers had collated evidence of how to improve formative assessment. They also reported that this improvement was more marked for those pupils with special educational needs:

This research also demonstrates another important point: that good formative assessment helps low attainers more than the others, and so reduces the range of attainment while raising attainment overall.

(E842, Part 2, p.87)

According to the study guide, formative assessment consisted of informal day-to-day assessment carried out in the classroom to inform teaching and learning, or more specifically, feedback. In the view of the course team, formative assessment was located within a view of learning as occurring through interaction, rather than through transmission. This sat well with my own attraction to the social constructivist position as a way to account for the importance of the social dimension in learning. During the time I was studying that module (January – October 2003), a poster summarising research-based knowledge on effective classroom practice of formative assessment (Broadfoot et al., 2002) arrived on my desk. I put the poster on the wall of my classroom and began to look more closely into how I might develop my formative assessment practice.

Because so many of my Y7 children experienced literacy difficulties, I studied next the module E801 'Difficulties in Literacy Development', to help me meet the needs of these learners. During this module, I carried out research surveying the provision made for

KS2 pupils experiencing barriers to literacy in ICT. I presented my findings to KS2 staff during one of my workshops as ICT co-ordinator. As the staff expressed interest, the findings formed the basis for staff discussion aimed at making our practice more effective. After this, the then vice-principal, Julianne White, who as a KS1 teacher had not been present at the workshop, came and asked me to talk through my findings with her. My findings had identified an area of ICT where school practice was weak and this had worried the SMT. As a consequence this area was put into the School Development Plan (SDP) for the next year. This motivated me, when I was developing my doctoral proposal, during the following year to select an area of focus that would contribute to our work together as a staff. Assessment for Learning (AfL), as formative assessment had come to be labelled, attracted me as a research focus since, I was interested in it, and because it was coming on stream in Northern Ireland policy I knew the staff would share this interest. I had hopes that my doctoral research would contribute to thinking about how we developed AfL in school.

In that year, whilst I was writing my proposal, my timetable was divided between teaching music alongside class teachers in Y6 and Y7 and working with small groups of children from Y6 and Y7 identified with having literacy or numeracy difficulties. The principal, James Clarke, and vice-principal, Julianne White, met with me to arrange for my new role in school. The following paragraphs are extracted from my research notes reflecting on some issues from that meeting:

In discussion with principal and vice-principal of how my timetable would work, debate about who would set work was raised. I insisted I was not prepared to be given exercises by class teachers to work through with pupils (e.g. 'comprehension tests' - as I referred to them) but that I wanted to be free to work on [the] basis of the needs of the pupils as I understand them to be since I have greater knowledge of these particular [Y7] pupils ...

I suggested that if we all agreed on the learning outcome or intention of the session then I might be free to approach it as I saw fit. Julianne seemed reluctant to agree - 'they have their curriculum'. Mr Clarke seemed more open to this idea - explaining that to him this seemed reasonable since 'they have their outcome and you have your outcome too'. When he said this he held an imaginary exercise book in his hands and indicated the outcome as being the work done in the book. I made a note of this wondering about what understanding of 'learning intention' he was holding. I will try to be upfront on this in my planning notes and ICT workshop agendas and action plans, etc. so I can have further discussion around this and find out what [the] principal's and other staff's thinking is.

(Research notebook January 2005)

This interaction had significance for me as it reflected the trust the principal had in my practice and motivated me to explore how learning intentions, a significant element in developing good feedback, were understood by staff. I started trying out some of Black and Wiliam's ideas as I worked with my small groups and classes that term. My Y6 and Y7 colleagues were unaware of AfL but they were interested in the ideas and during music lessons worked with me and the children using learning intentions and negotiating success criteria in line with the recommendations about good practice in formative assessment.

I recognised that I needed a more defined research focus and children's writing came to the fore because of the importance this curricular area had been given in the school. In April 2004 all NI primary schools had been issued with a summary of end of Key Stage assessment results for the five-year period from 1998/1999 to 2002/2003. The Senior Management team were alarmed that the school's KS2 literacy results were trending below the national norms, with writing scores being particularly depressed (see Figure 1.1). The principal called a meeting of all KS2 staff and we had a brainstorming session on what could be done to turn things around. It was a good meeting with lots of ideas shared. I took the initiative to collate these ideas for the principal because I wanted to support it and

hoped the ideas would not be lost but built on. Julianne (who was literacy co-ordinator in addition to her role as vice-principal) consulted with the literacy advisory staff in the Education and Library Board. They suggested we revise the approach we had been introduced to when training had been given under the Northern Ireland Literacy Strategy. This was the First Steps genre approach (Education Department of Western Australia, 2004). As a consequence, Julianne prepared workshops and writing was given a high priority on the 2004/2005 School Development Plan and in my research proposal.

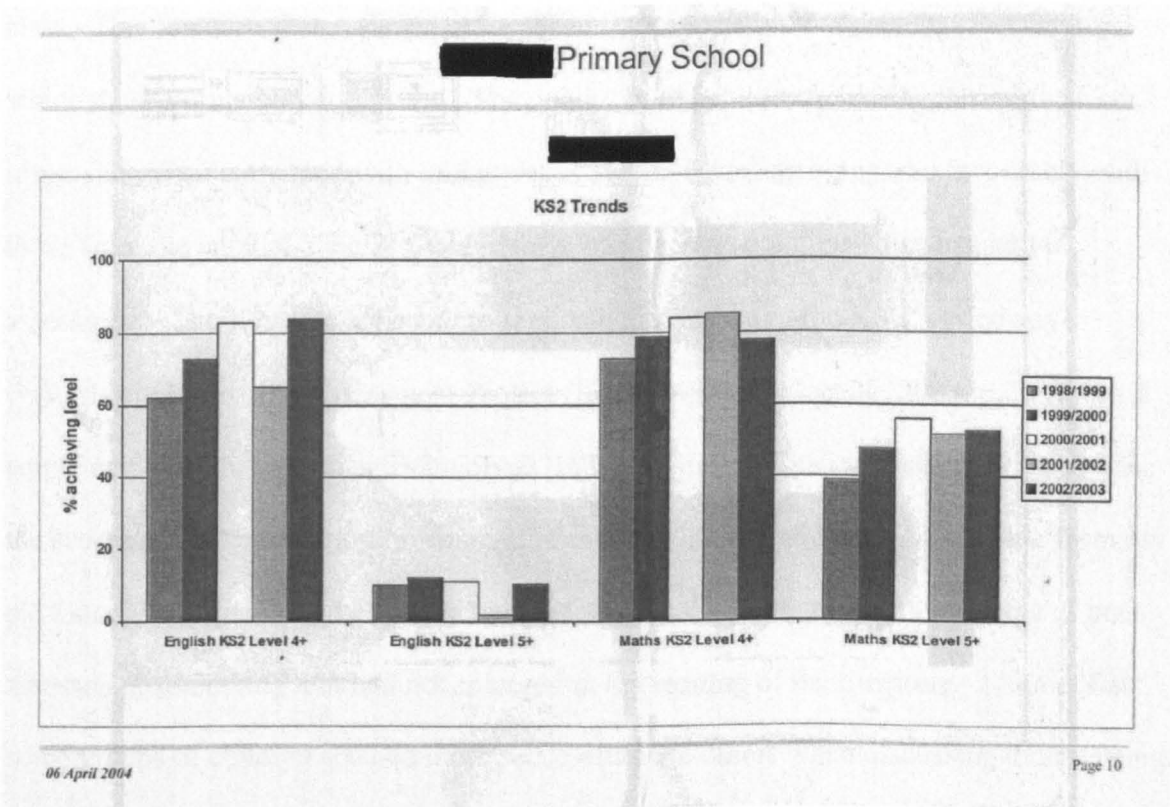


Figure 1.1 End of KS2 assessment results for five-year period 1998/1999 to 2002/2003

Engaging with formative assessment

Working with my Y7 class (Summer term 2005)

During the summer term 2005, I was allocated to a mainstream Y7 class. This move created the first opportunity for me to work alongside the same children daily and begin to develop my practice of teaching and assessment together. I understood that writing was a curricular area that had been shown to be very amenable to the use of formative assessment

approaches (see, for example, Black et al., 2003). So I carried out pilot research for my doctoral study as part of my final master's module. I used action research when teaching writing to evaluate the effectiveness of peer-assessment, an important formative procedure and an intervention that I understood to be a precursor to self-assessment.

As a Key Stage, we were advised to use First Steps (Education Department of Western Australia, 2004) as a framework to guide our teaching and assessment of writing. This provided me with lists of features of different writing genres, which I shared with my class. This functioned as a checklist for the children to help them decide the extent to which their writing was successful. The quality of the children's writing during the term improved, when compared with initial pieces and their writing compared favourably with those from the parallel Y7 class, where there had been no attempt to use formative assessment. These results appeared to replicate the finding of the King's-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project (KMOFAP) (Black et al., 2003, p.2): 'there is ample evidence that the changes involved [in introducing formative assessment] will raise the scores of students on normal conventional tests'. A second conclusion I drew from my pilot study was that skills in talking and listening were a prerequisite for this type of peer-assessment something that had not emerged in my reading of the literature. I found that some groups of children seemed more successful than others when discussing their writing.

Working with my Y4 class (2005 -2006)

In August 2005 I was allocated to teach a Y4 class (pupils aged 8) in the next school year which was a significant change for me. With these younger children I decided to continue to research my practice in preparation for my doctoral study. (So I continued to collect data in my research notebook and sometimes through audio recording.) I wanted to explore the possibility that if I took a step back and taught children how to talk together then they might be able to discuss their learning more easily and peer-assessment might be even more successful. I came across the approach of Mercer (e.g. 2000) and during this

year, I included lessons in talking in pairs and small groups. I hoped that developing and using ground rules for talk would empower the children to be able to engage in exploratory talk. They would learn to identify and avoid patterns of interaction labelled by Mercer (2000, p.173) as 'disputational talk', in which participants work to keep their identities separate. I wanted them to learn to extend their discussion; some groups in the Y7 class during the previous term had simply dismissed each item for discussion as quickly as possible.

The children's communication skills through talking and listening improved. However, a major, unanticipated change occurred. After several months, we were talking together as a whole class in the same exploratory way as in pairs or small groups. I decided to experiment with a change in classroom layout to reflect this. We moved the desks into an open rectangle arrangement so that every person could see everyone else and we could talk back and forward together. This development in talking and listening skills had supported my original intention of enabling children to discuss learning. Nevertheless, when I reflected on this way of working in my classroom, in the light of the experiences of the AfL researchers, I found that my practice seemed very different. Somehow a process that had begun with the intention of setting out learning intentions, discussing together how we would know we had achieved them (our success criteria), and displaying them to refer to during the activity, had evolved. I had a dilemma; I seemed to be enacting formative assessment differently from published examples in two particular respects. First I was stating learning intention in broad terms, which was contrary to the advice given in the formative assessment literature. Clarke (2001, p.21 Clarke's emphasis), for example, cautions:

Teachers need to separate the task instructions clearly from the learning intention and success criteria, or children can begin their work without knowing clearly the difference between **what you want them to do** and **what you want them to learn**.

My lessons, however, would routinely begin with a simple announcement of our topic, for example, 'We are learning about area.' After that, in a second difference from published examples, I had children suggest their ideas of what learning about a particular topic might entail. As we discussed these, I wrote them in bulleted points under the title: 'Remember ..'. These lists bore a superficial resemblance to formative assessment success criteria, but we used them in a different way. For us they were points of referral for subsequent lessons, which would support further 'thinking together' (a phrase we used to describe the process of discussion).

In the first term I sometimes asked the children to write both the learning intention and the success criteria we had created together into their books. For example, on Monday 19th September, the children wrote poems entitled, Park. Under the date, each person wrote:

We are learning to concentrate on details.

Remember ...

It doesn't have to rhyme;

Help the reader to picture it in their mind.

(Pupil's Creative Writing book 19/09/2005)

As the months passed, it became far less common to find children writing in this way in their books, but every display of children's work around the room had its accompanying learning intention statement and list of remembers. My practice was to introduce a lesson by saying something like: 'Today we are going to be learning about area. What can you tell me about area?' I would then write the various points the children made using a bulleted list. We would refer to 'our remembers' and sometimes I would ask children, 'What could our remembers be for this topic?' These statements would then be rehearsed, and if necessary revised, in a plenary at the end of the lesson. During subsequent lessons on the same topic, further statements would be added as our learning progressed. I was delighted with how this practice focussed our learning together and engaged the children.



Figure 1.2 Display of our work on area (June 2006)

The term ‘remember’ had come to have a special meaning within our practice. The list of ‘remembers’ on the display board for the topic on area reads:

Square centimetres (cm²);

Pinboards;

Height multiplied by width.

This reveals how our ‘remembers’ had moved away from success criteria as objectives and were gradually becoming a discourse about the terms, concepts and artefacts that the children associated with doing activities about area. The development of this particular list of ‘remembers’ allows insight into some of the ways in which the class had developed their learning together. When I introduced the topic of area, no one was able to contribute anything about what area meant to them. This was unusual as generally someone had something to say about anything mentioned in the classroom. To deal with this I suggested that we try an activity I had planned and as we got involved in the activity we might be

able to figure out what area might be about. I gave out squared paper and demonstrated how I wanted the children to place their hand on the page and draw around it. The squares inside the outline of their hand could then be counted and recorded. Early finishers were invited to try the extension activity, to create a picture of something else that had the same number of squares as their hand.

At the end of the session ideas about what area was about were gathered, based on other activity. Someone suggested that you needed to use squared paper for area work so area involved the idea of square centimetres. Someone else suggested that you could use pinboards and elastic bands because the pins were in a grid like the paper. The third suggestion (height multiplied by width) was added the next day. One of the children had gone home and discussed the topic with her family. Her older sister had told her that area was about height multiplied by width and so she had contributed that. Sfard (2006) says that young children engage in specialist discourse without necessarily understanding it in relation to practice but because it is something that others they value consider important. It seemed at the time that this was why this child offered it, it was what her sister knew. None of the children entered into discussion when this point was raised. However, it was my practice to include every suggestion made by the class in our list; just as brainstorming is designed as a way to involve every person in making a contribution and no filtering of good or bad, or more or less appropriate ideas, is recommended in the initial stages of the process. I considered that, as our work developed, this statement could become a structuring resource for us; our practice could continue to evolve a negotiated interpretation of that statement.

I had begun to read Bruner (1996) and I was particularly interested in his discussion of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis - that thought is shaped by the language in which it is formulated or expressed. Bruner argues for the value of helping learners to explore the nature and uses of language in order to reduce the constraints imposed by it as a symbolic

system. I began to understand the value of ‘our remembers’ to lie in the way they provided a more permanent, and yet flexible, account of ‘what was said’.

Different as they undoubtedly were, I believed that the practices described were nevertheless valid ways to enact formative assessment. In the first place, it seemed to me that teachers involved in the KMOFAP project had had a similar experience in terms of how classroom practice developed in unexpected ways. It had not been a straightforward matter of implementing the ideas. The researchers (Black et al., 2003, p.30) reported that teachers: ‘began developing and reshaping strategies’; the report referred to the transformation of the implementation of formative assessment. When I turned to the wider literature, I read Drummond’s (2003, p.182) summary of the KMOFAP project. She wrote: ‘teachers became more effective as they redefined their role in learning, repositioning themselves with their pupils as “partners in pursuit of a shared goal”’. Drummond detected a fundamental change in teacher-learner relationships and therefore pedagogy. My experience was similar; I had repositioned myself alongside the children. Even the reorganisation of classroom furniture indicated this; I included my own desk alongside the children’s in our rectangular arrangement.

A second reason for my confidence was that, according to Black and Wiliam (2003, p.122), there was one ‘critical criterion’ for formative assessment:

Formative assessment is a process, one in which information about learning is evoked and then used to modify the teaching and learning activities in which teachers and students are engaged.

The interactive way in which the children and I worked together to express our evolving understanding of particular topics fulfilled this criterion. As I listened during classroom interactions, I was building up a sense of how the children understood the various topics. I could then support further learning. I knew that this listening and guiding work was at the heart of the formative assessment process; the Assessment Reform Group’s (ARG)

(Broadfoot et al., 2002) definition of formative assessment, or Assessment for Learning (AfL) states:

Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

However the AfL literature seemed to have individual learners in view, whereas I understood it as referring to the socially constructed learning of the group.

Assessment traditionally deals with individuals, with the expectation that children will produce quantities of individually created written work. I had shifted the emphasis towards corporately created work, by pairs, small groups or the entire class. Black and Wiliam (2006, p.87) argue that in formative assessment: 'the crucial interaction is that between teacher and student'. However, I had found a different way to enact formative assessment in which interactional lines could be drawn between and among all members of the classroom community. When I discussed this during my first tutorial with my doctoral supervisor, she queried whether little by little a cultural change had taken place in my classroom. I was unable to explain or account for it with recourse to any of the formative assessment literature.

I connected this observation of my supervisor to what I had recently read in Bruner (1996, p.65). He defines culture as 'implicit semi-connected knowledge of the world, from which through negotiation, people arrive at satisfactory ways of acting in given contexts'. As I pondered on this, I began to think differently about my classroom practice with my Y4 children. It seemed to me that in the curricular contexts of the classroom, I was engaging in a process where we worked together to try to make our 'implicit semi-connected knowledge' explicit in our list of 'remembers'. Our lists contained our thinking. They were a place to hold our ideas so that we could display them, add to and change them as we continued, lesson by lesson, to make connections that took our understanding

further. They were working documents, always contingent upon new ways of seeing things, discoveries children made from talking about the ideas at home, seeing something in a book or on television.

In February 2006, I worked with a colleague, Rosemary McKittrick, to determine, with her, to what extent I was achieving the first of the objectives: 'The children will begin to assess themselves in terms of the learning intention for each lesson,' that I had set myself, under the newly introduced Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme (Regional Training Unit, 2005). Rosemary observed part of a literacy lesson in my classroom and met with me to discuss her observations. I assumed that the AfL practice of self-assessment could only be achieved if learners had a clear idea of the goals of their learning. In reviewing my work with the children, I commented on the Classroom Observation Feedback Record in response to Rosemary's feedback:

[This observation] has supported me by:

- a) Confirming that the aims of the lesson appear to be clearly communicated to the children, and
- b) acknowledging that the children were using talk to think together to explore the concepts raised in the lesson. (In order for them to be able to negotiate success criteria with me they need good understanding.)

(Classroom Observation Feedback Form 17/02/2006)

As I reflected, I recognised that although I was valuing and encouraging talk in the classroom, the purpose of the talk assumed that children have limited agency in the learning process; their task, as I positioned them, was to understand what I was offering them. However, my colleague's observation enabled me to question this interpretation. She commented that the brainstorming session for example had encouraged debate. She remarked on how an element of doubt was raised, namely, would a good story have facts? She felt that the children were challenged by this, which would suggest that I was not uncomfortable with a situation in which doubts were raised and expressed. There was no

suggestion in her view that the children's views had been brought into line with those of the teacher. Rather, she commented that I had inspired the children to think their ideas through. With the help of my colleague, I was enabled to recognise that our classroom talk was taking us somewhere else than simply towards some stated learning intention.

Other characteristics of my practice that my colleague noted included: my relationship with the children – she described my ‘informal “human” touch evident in teaching’ – and the children's relationships with each other - she wrote: ‘Mixed ability groups worked well – children were a support to each other - tasks given which encouraged children to strive after joint goals.’ This interaction with my colleague whilst giving me insights into positive features of my practice also made it clear that I had not had that understanding myself, nor could I have explained why I practised in the way that I did. I was not aware of the thinking behind my actions.

The classroom as writing workshop

With my Y4 class I was also building on my learning about writing by focusing their attention on aspects of the craft of writing – matters such as setting, plot, characterisation, and so on. This meant that while I based the writing tasks on existing Y4 planning, my learning intentions were different from those of my colleague in the parallel Y4 class. I was working between titles for stories that were in the Y4 curriculum and the process approach I had brought from my previous work with older children in school (Ellis and Friel, 1995). For example, in one of the first writing projects, I encouraged the children to include enough detail in their writing to help their readers ‘see pictures and hear sounds’. During the first lesson we had a fifteen minute period of writing in silence, when everyone wrote, including myself, followed by reading our writing to each other (on other occasions this might be in pairs, or, as in this case, to the whole class). Working in this way I was challenging the practice associated with AfL that learning intentions are givens and non negotiable as they reflect the specified curriculum. This also presumes that meanings can

be handed over and be understood in the same way by all children. In addition I was placing myself alongside the children and engaging in the task with them so that my understanding of the learning intention in practice would be available for consideration and renegotiation. Following this initial writing session, the rest of the story was to be written on to a folded origami house. The story idea came from a sequence of four pictures, which together outlined the story of a house being burgled, while the house-holder slept until he was awoken by the dog. The origami houses were then displayed so the stories could be more widely read.

When a child read his or her writing, my practice was to invite comments from the class. Hands were raised and the child who had shared their work chose which of the children they would invite to comment. At the end of September, I tried to develop this by asking the children if they could suggest any ideas to help the person make their story 'even better' - a form of peer-assessment. After several contributions had been made, I suggested that it might be possible for us to help each other make our stories even better and if the reader would like to hear people's ideas then we could ask that question. This is another example of how I was trying to shift how expertise was understood in the classroom away from the teacher and legitimising the children as knowledgeable writers. It was a concern of mine to get children to see each other as resources for learning. As this practice continued, it was noticeable that some children asked for comments to improve their writing, and some did not. In evaluating this activity I wrote:

Introduced the element 'maybe you have an idea that might make X's story even better' and suggested individuals might choose to collect comments to help them (some did – Alan chose not to!) Ann's story – Emily suggested, 'You have a lot of 'Charlie's' – you could say 'he'.

(Planning notes September, 2005)

By June 2006, this kind of reading and discussing of each other's stories had become routine. Along the way, the formal invitation to comment on 'something that might make

the story even better' had been dropped. As the following transcription of a short class discussion (7/6/2006) exemplifies, the children had begun to engage directly with each other in a very business-like and serious way. There was no longer any need for a planned peer-assessment activity. The children were holding each other to account, in terms of their understanding of what writing was about, which we were negotiating together. These two aspects, the building of knowledge and the holding to account, might influence how the children understand the goals of their learning and of the tasks.

The children clearly found the comments of their peers helpful; all seven of those who read their stories during the lesson from which the data selections below are drawn were volunteers. In these types of discussions the principle channels of dialogue routinely flowed between the contributions of the person leading it, the writer, and the contributions of the persons whom he or she invited to speak. However, all of the children were actively engaged as the various points raised were informally discussed among the children. It was out of this informal discussion (which we referred to as 'thinking together') that hands were raised to offer further ideas to the writer.

The earlier part of the lesson was spent considering how writers create atmosphere in their stories. I had read some story extracts and the children had shared some of their favourite scary passages from stories they had read. After that, the children worked for a short time writing the opening for a scary story. I was encouraging them to put their energy into setting the scene for some 'happening' that would be introduced in the next lesson. I had not yet revealed to the children that this story was going to involve an alien. Ann was the first of seven children who read their story to the class (group discussion is indicated by the symbol [...]):

ANN: [reading her story-opening] One afternoon, as the sun went down, the schools were closed. The classroom was very dark and no-one was there. The streets were empty and everyone was in bed.

RACHEL: If it's the afternoon people wouldn't be in bed in the afternoon.

ANN: Well some of them might be tired and all

[...]

ANN: Some people might be ...

A VOICE: [above the general murmur (calling to Ann)] It's kind of like at night, Ann.

[...]

ANN: [taking charge and asking one person to contribute] Charis you can say it – or
Sarah –

[Several voices still speaking]

SH: [intervening to quieten things down] Right, hold on, Paul, Charis

ANN: I might change it, I might say 'night'

SH: Well, thank you Rachel. [I am intending to bring this discussion to a close by
thanking the person who raised the issue in the first place.]

ANOTHER VOICE: I know, you could ...

SH: Now hold on, wait until Ann chooses who she wants [reminding the person who has
spoken out of turn, that the writer has the right to choose who she wants to hear
from]

ANN [choosing from hands raised]: Sarah

SARAH: Well you could say, 'One evening ...'

[Another voice or two is heard, trying ideas out]

ANN: Yeah, because ...

[...]

ANN: Paul

PAUL: You know the way you said 'afternoon' – afternoon's after twelve o'clock in the
morning.

SH: Well, we've already discussed that point. Is there anybody wants to make a
different point?

ANN: Clara

CLARA: It's very good so far.

ANN: Thank you. Right, John.

JOHN: You could say ...

SOMEONE ELSE: [building on what John started] You could say the sun went slowly
down

SH: The sun went slowly down and then that gets another word into it

ANN : Nicola

NICOLA: Did you say 'afternoon'? You said afternoon, they wouldn't be in bed in the
afternoon because they'd still be in school by then.

SH: Well, there's strong objections to the afternoon.

ANN: Six o'clock is the afternoon

SH: Six o'clock – she's thinking of

ANN: What what..

SH: That's like a late afternoon time

[General hubbub of discussion – voice sounding out 'ten o'clock']

SH: No, Bill [caretaker] locks up at half-five so we'd be gone by then, and don't forget
in the winter time that it would be getting dark earlier. This might not be
happening in summer. So it's possible that by six o'clock in the winter it probably
would be dark, wouldn't it? There, Clara has something more to say. Do you want
to read yours? Go on then.

This was a lengthy discussion (two and a half minutes) in which the children were
challenging the coherence of the writer's work. However, there was no sign that anyone
was finding it awkward. Possible changes that were discussed within the class often
developed into redrafting. For example, in the case of the above story opening, Ann
changed what she had written afterwards, and in her final version the story begins:

One afternoon, as the sun went down the schools were closed. The classroom was very
dark and no-one was there. Then the tap started to drip. The chairs were rattling. Then
the door opened and something went into our classroom.

(Ghost Story by Ann 8/6/2006)

I did not fully appreciate that these ‘thinking together’ sessions were crucially important as the site of the intersubjective process, as the children worked together to make sense of whatever task we were engaged in. I thought of them in terms of the narrower AfL notion of feedback. As I reflected on how my class worked together during such discussions, I wrote in my research notebook:

Some of the AfL models in the literature focus on feedback from the teacher to an individual – I don't see it primarily like that. Yes, individuals get feedback but the group gives it (based on the ‘remembers’ we have negotiated and these will evolve during the cycle). And all our oeuvres [I was using this term from Bruner (1996) to refer to children's writing] are produced in a cycle represented diagrammatically at Figure 3 (Research Notebook 2005/2006, p.55)

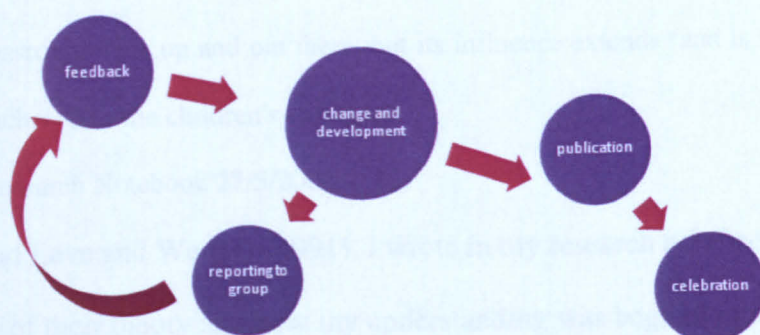


Figure 1.3 Oeuvres creation process

I began to explore the literature on distributed cognition and quickly realised that this opened up a completely new world of social-learning thinkers. The perspectives that they offered seemed absent from the formative assessment literature. This was acknowledged by a prominent AfL researcher, James (2006, p.58), when she wrote: ‘more work needs to be done to develop approaches to assessment coherent with a socio-cultural perspective on learning’. I became increasingly concerned that I was unable to theorise my classroom practice; for example, I noted the following reflective question whilst reading Black and Wiliam (2005):

I wonder if what I have been trying to do is to use the strategies in ways that make sense to me from the point of view of my own view of mind and ideas on pedagogy regardless of Black and Wiliam's?

(Research notebook 8/6/2006, p.2)

I found I was making connections with Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of legitimate peripheral participation which situates learners as participants in the practice of the expert, acquiring the skill to perform by engaging in the process. I reflected on how my classroom practice had developed throughout the year:

I see learning to write as coming to an understanding and entering into the 'fellowship' of those practitioners who write – school is one interface for this process to take place as children read / discuss / analyse / listen to / work with / model and have modelled for them / jointly construct, etc., writing. The community of practice extends beyond the classroom – it's up and out there, but its influence extends (and is mediated through the teacher) into the children's experience.

(Research Notebook 27/5/2006, p.24)

As I read Lave and Wenger (1991), I wrote in my research notebook of the sense I was making of their theory and how my understanding was beginning to shape my pedagogy.

(The lesson objective referred to was for the writing lesson on 7/6/2006, referenced above.)

This felt a bit like a turning point! I had decided to try to discover if I could align myself with any particular theoretical position re learning. I have been reading the various accounts and becoming convinced that I am on the social construction side of things (that's where I positioned myself at the end of E842, more or less). But I find my thinking is similar in many ways to the situativists [sic]. So yesterday I wrote a lesson objective which grew out of my clearer understanding of that theory. I was reading Murphy's (1999, p.xi) summary of Lave and Wenger (1991):

They [Lave and Wenger] argue that learning is about becoming a participant, knowing is therefore judged in terms of belonging and participation within a

community. What constitutes knowledge is the practices, activities and discourse of the community.

From that I wrote:

As a class we will be thinking together about creating atmosphere in our writing.

We will be writing 'scary' story beginnings together.

In that statement I am signalling that the talking (and use of artefacts, including ideas and memories) is the work and participation is the learning. The writing is part of the community discourse since the writing is constructed in the social situation (with ongoing pair or small group interaction as ideas are suggested and tried out) and written work is read to [the] class and feedback sought and given to each other, leading to changes (or not) - e.g. discussion on word 'afternoon'.

(Research notebook 8/6/2006)

I was beginning to understand that learning to write is about mutual engagement; children needed to be involved in the practice so they could change and alongside that, the practice itself would change.

In my research proposal I had identified my research to be:

- a) an examination of the principles underlying AfL procedures in an attempt to ensure that the potential of the procedures is exploited as fully as possible;
- b) an attempt to demonstrate the validity of the claims that have been made for the value of formative assessment in enhancing learning.

Since then my thinking had moved on and I was beginning to explore the possibilities that some of the key sociocultural theorists offered:

I think I want my Initial Study to take my understanding of the research away from the individualistic focus of my pilot to look at the situated idea of the learner and the context being inseparable and therefore must be studied as a whole, for example, I could look at some recordings of class (or group) discussion and consider the AfL strategies being used and how they are used by the teacher to shape discussion.

Am I trying to find out 'How these children are learning?', e.g. Who is saying what?

What are the children doing? (passive or active, something else, e.g. drawing or reaching for a reference book, etc.)

What evidence is there that learning is taking place? (Would interviews afterwards be useful or concept-mapping before and after?)

Is the context of my classroom during discussion a 'proper context for learning to take place', in Lave and Wenger's terms?

And, that being the case, to what extent is this learning context being shaped by AfL's principles or strategies. How have I found it necessary to adapt these from the various models in the AfL literature?

(Research Notebook 27/5/2006, p.23)

At this point the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (NIC), with AfL embedded within it, began to be introduced.

Formative Assessment in the Northern Ireland (NI) context and in the institutional context

The beginning of the official change over to the revised NI Curriculum (NIC) was September 2007, when it became statutory in Years 1 and 5. In September 2010 the final cohorts, Years 4 and 7 would complete the changeover. Schools were issued with a 'Planning for Implementation' DVD and booklet (CCEA, 2006), in Spring 2006, and encouraged to introduce elements of the NIC into their School Development Plan (SDP). In the following academic year 2006/2007, the first year of my doctoral study, all staff attended an introductory training day; Y1 and Y5 teachers had three days training as they were the first to implement it. Targets were set for the introduction of AfL within numeracy during 2006/2007 and this was extended into literacy in 2007/2008, with Y1 and Y5 teachers taking the lead in in-house training in 2006.

AfL is not a statutory requirement of the NIC but it is promoted as supporting the requirements of many of its statutory elements; the following statement appeared in the

AfL section of the Planning for Implementation pack: 'Adopting AfL practices in your classroom, therefore, allows you to fulfil many aspects of the NIC through a single initiative'. In policy documents AfL appeared to be seen as requiring a procedural, rather than a fundamental change in teaching and learning; for example, a list of classroom procedures given in the Planning for Implementation pack is introduced as follows: 'AfL requires the application of specific elements to produce the desired results'. My engagement with formative assessment had led me to very different conclusions. It appeared that how AfL was enshrined in policy was going to create problems for my practice.

As I waited to begin my doctoral research in May 2006 I also became aware of differences in the way my class worked when compared with neighbouring classes. In June 2006 I was afforded an opportunity to observe in the Y3 class I would teach in the following year. This observation had been organised for me to observe a typical classroom episode and to provide me with some insight into the children.

What I observed shocked me profoundly. The children's role was to complete a worksheet. I could detect no sense of their contributing to the learning. Talking had no role in learning. Listening to the teacher and responding to direct questions with 'right' answers was all that was required. Every child carried out the same activity and the product was identical for each. On this basis it appeared to me that I had witnessed actions and transactions arising from very different assumptions about learning and the nature of knowledge than those I held. Knowledge appeared to be conceived of as a fixed, objective commodity, something possessed by the teacher and dispensed to the children and learning was a process of internalising this knowledge. The activity was designed to provide many opportunities for children to apply their knowledge, as the teacher understood it, in making correct responses to questions on the worksheet.

This experience heightened my awareness of the existence of different pedagogical approaches. A major difference was in the way the children in my class engaged with me in producing knowledge. I began to consider the goal I had set myself of improving my practice of formative assessment in relation to teaching this new class. For a second time, I found myself concluding that effective practice of formative assessment would require foundational or preparatory work. I was aware that children needed to be able to talk about their learning if they were to engage in their own assessment. However I was very conscious that this Y4 class constituted a new situation, I could not introduce my 'Talk Lessons' and try to recreate what I had had before. I concluded that I needed to find a way to work with these children to challenge their experience of schooled learning and to allow them to become proactive and creative, just as my present class were. In other words I saw my practice as effective and my colleague's as problematic and out of sync with the research into formative assessment and my growing understanding of research into learning. However, others interpreted my practice differently.

During the previous term, the principal had retired and a new principal, Cynthia Black, had been appointed. Within weeks, Mrs Black, who had no knowledge of my history as a teacher, informed me that parents with concerns had approached her. These were not parents of children in my class, but parents of Y3 children due to enter my class in the following academic year. Two issues were raised: questions were being asked about children's written work, for example, how much individual written work were children doing; the second issue was classroom management, were the children being given more freedom than they should have, should I be more in control? With hindsight it occurs to me that I might have asked how parents might have come to such a question regarding behaviour management in my class. At the time I did not query this. 'This sounds serious,' I commented to Cynthia. 'I'd better write these down.' I pulled out my notebook. I was not sure where I stood, but I was reassured by the business-like way

Cynthia proposed to address the matter. She explained that since these matters had been raised, she had no option but to investigate whether or not there was any substance to them.

Cynthia examined children's class work books and seemed satisfied that all was in order, except for the creative writing books. I had been using these books in a way she seemed not to recognise as creative writing. In her view creative writing books should be an anthology of children's writing; I had used them for all stages in the creation of stories or poems. She was expecting to see books filled with finished products, instead the books were full of notes, pictures, and paragraph-length pieces; they had crossings out, lengthy comments and suggestions written by the teacher; some sections were highlighted in marker; interspersed were finished stories. They were untidy, but readable. I had worked hard to support the children's writing. I believed that they had produced some excellent pieces, and that I had made progress in learning how to teach writing. The principal disagreed and decided that since I had moved from Y7 to Y4 I would benefit from having some support in learning how to teach creative writing. She proposed that the literacy co-ordinator, Julianne, would join me in team-teaching during creative writing lessons in the autumn term of 2006. In this way from being positioned as an effective and competent teacher tasked with disseminating good practice and leading other colleagues in developing their practice and studying practice at post graduate level I became someone whose professionalism and competence was called into question.

I was caught in a dilemma - on one hand, the children were all very engaged in writing and supporting each other's work through listening, reading and discussion. They were making connections with expert practice, too, through our shared reading of novels and poetry. (Figure 1.4 gives some indication of the range of poetry the children chose to share with each other during the year.)

I was satisfied that writing was highly valued in my class. I knew that the children were excited about their learning and growing in confidence and expertise as writers.

Furthermore I was experiencing very positive responses from parents: for example, in a conversation towards the end of the year Paul's parents told me about change they had noticed in their son: 'He's happy and enquiring. [When we're talking at home] he'll be



Figure 1.4 Poet Tree - when the children shared a poem with the class they wrote the author's name and title of the poem.

asking questions and thinking. He's turned on to learning.' (Research Notebook 8/6/2006, p.19). But at the same time, the new principal questioned my practice recognising it as very different and possibly unacceptable. Yet I was set on a learning trajectory that assumed the opposite and with the intention of sharing my learning with my colleagues.

The following points summarise my position about my practice as I began my research.

- AfL is more than just strategies but the theoretical underpinning and rationale is unclear;

- I had acted and was pleased with the outcomes but could not theorise what I had done or why although I was beginning this process;
- I had fundamentally changed practice in the classroom, rather than enacting procedural change, which is suggested in Northern Ireland policy documents. Furthermore, this fundamental change appeared to conflict with others' expectations of what assessment should be about and more importantly what represents learning.

As I planned how I would approach my Initial Study I began to problematise AfL by posing two questions that reflected how my experience of practice was beginning to shape my theorising.

Do the AfL strategies have a place in classroom contexts different from those of the original research? For example, if the pedagogy is wholly different (say constructionist as opposed to transmission) can they be adapted? How?

What changes does the introduction of the strategies bring about in a classroom ecology developed along 'community of practice' lines – where learning is produced together and pupils routinely 'feedback' to each other and from the teacher (by asking and answering questions) and where learning goals are negotiated and renegotiated together?

(Research Notebook 04/06/06)

These issues shaped my research questions which I recast in the following way:

Research questions (September 2006)

What is formative assessment? For I have discovered that it exists in a whole variety of conceptualisations, with Black and Wiliam's (1998a) report and subsequent ARG work being the most widely known in the UK;

What is the theoretical underpinning of formative assessment (particularly in its more frequently encountered form as AfL)?

How can formative assessment be developed in my classroom with children aged 7-8 years old? How applicable are AfL strategies for primary children? What mediates formative assessment?

My approach to answering these questions, as I began my research in September 2006, was a dual one as I worked between theory and practice as a dialectical process; reflection on my classroom data would involve consideration of theory, and as I worked together between the two, dilemmas would arise; as I framed such dilemmas I was enabled to come to knowing-in-practice solutions (Lave, 1988). The challenge to my practice heightened my need to theorise it and led me to the literature which discussed the social nature of learning and distributed cognition. My intention was to explore these theories in order to develop my practice in ways that resonated with my experiences of how children learn. So these initial research questions determined how I began my study. However, I was at this point required to make a significant change in my practice to accommodate institutional practices and expectations. This meant that writing would be restricted to isolated, once-a-week, sessions. The children would be expected to complete finished pieces within those sessions. And how I worked with the children would be subject to negotiation with the literacy co-ordinator. It also meant that I needed to pay attention to what the literature on learning had to offer me to better understand how my practice was understood and shaped by others and how that influenced the possibilities for my own progression as a practitioner. The next chapter presents my review of the literature and how this formed my approach to the research.

Chapter 2 Views on learning, knowledge and pedagogy: a sociocultural approach

A sociocultural view of mind is radically different from views of mind in other theoretical accounts of learning. This difference turns on whether mind is viewed as something located within an individual and which may be understood as separate from the external environment, or whether such a boundary is not delineated and mind is therefore viewed as social. In this latter view, cognition is understood as collaborative; understanding is developed among and between people. Hence Bredo writes of 'acting mindfully', a phrase which locates mind in the interaction between an individual and the environment (Bredo, 1999, p.36). Socioculturalists tend to add qualifiers when they use the word cognition, for example in the terms situated cognition, or distributed cognition. While some eschew the use of the word entirely, for example, Wertsch (1991) prefers the word mind, as it conveys a sense of how thinking is not isolated brain work but is better thought of as integrating a wide range of psychological phenomena.

Other theories see cognition as a matter of individual mental processing. How this mental process is understood varies from theory to theory. For example, in symbol-processing accounts, individuals learn by receiving information and processing it internally in much the same way as the practice I had observed in my colleague's classroom. In constructivism, learning is construed as taking place as an individual works with others' ideas to take his or her own thinking forward. Social constructivists recognise social influences, with social partners understood as modifying and adapting their individual thinking in relation to the other. This process of mutual adaptation is labelled as intersubjectivity, a term which is used differently by socioculturalists.

Viewing cognition as situated (Bredo, 1999) or distributed, frees socioculturalists from having to deal with arbitrary boundaries between the individual and the rest of the world. Cognition is distributed across people as they collaborate with each other and with

tools designed to aid in cognitive work. This means that in the study, as I seek to enact and examine formative assessment, I need to examine how cognition as a collaborative process functions and understand how expertise is made available among class members, which will involve studying the relations among participants as learning takes place. Rogoff (1995) has developed a tool for this purpose. Her challenge was to develop methods that examine individual contributions in relation to the course of their participation in sociocultural activity, rather than treating the individual's contributions as existing separately from the dynamic interpersonal and sociocultural aspects of the activity.

Rogoff's starting point was to designate a different unit of analysis; rather than focus on the individual (as an independent entity) her focus is on the activity (with contributions by varying people whose roles are mutually defining). It follows that the central research question of sociocultural enquiry is also different. While those who view mind as local, and socially influenced, enquire into 'what external influences affect the individual's development and how individuals generalize what they have acquired to new tasks', socioculturalists ask how 'people change through transforming their participation in sociocultural activities - in which both the individual and the rest of the world are active' (Rogoff, 1997, p.266).

The foundational concepts used in analysing sociocultural activity will inform how I enact authentic sociocultural formative assessment practices, and research them. It will, for example, be important to pay attention to cultural tools as I study cognitive processes. This is because artefacts, such as books, computers, languages, and pencils are essentially social, historical objects. They are representatives of earlier solutions to similar problems by other people, which later generations modify and apply to new problems, in the process, extending and transforming their use. As people use cognitive tools such as literacy in the classroom, they are engaging in a process of cognition that is distributed but hidden. This is because the process of moving from ink spots on a page to meaningful ideas is so

automatic that the role of the tools of literacy, as well as the author's, and other people's contribution to the process of reading may be easily overlooked. The relationship between people and cultural tools offers reference points indicating something of the thinking going on during particular endeavours. It is this shared thinking, between people, and in relation to cultural tools, that socioculturalists locate as the hub of learning: 'cognition occurs in shared involvement in community/institutional endeavours' (Rogoff, 1998).

This conception of shared thinking is described in the sociocultural use of the term intersubjectivity. This means that people are constantly engaged in processes of communication, which Rogoff styles as 'the bridge between one understanding of a situation and another' (Rogoff, 1990, p.71). What she has in mind are creative processes where people are focusing on something in common and are each bringing their own ideas to bear upon it. In the intersubjective process, shared understanding is formed on the basis of a common focus of attention and a shared endeavour. Differences in perspective demand that adjustments are made and so changes take place and development occurs. This means that pedagogical approaches that promote intersubjectivity and provide opportunities for children to talk together to share their ideas about what they are learning will be important.

In looking for evidence of learning, I will need to focus on pupils' active changes in understanding, facility and motivation as they participate in an unfolding event or an activity. These active changes, signalling the adjustments that people make, in their relationships with each other, and with respect to the tools they are using, are an example of the kind of ongoing, continuous changing, between individual experience and social systems, which socioculturalists label dialectical relationships. Lave and Wenger summarise this when they talk of 'agent, the activity and the world mutually constituting each other' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.33).

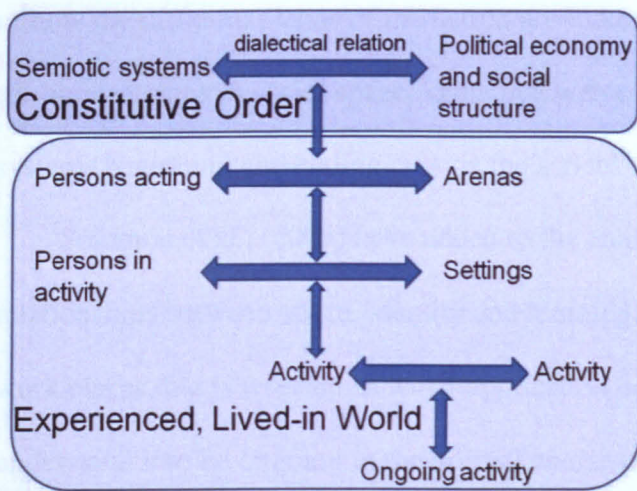


Figure 2.1 Modes of analysis for a dialectical problematic of practice (Lave, 1988, p.179)

The importance of this notion, for the study, is illustrated by reflecting on how socioculturalists use the term setting (Lave, 1988, see Figure 2.1 above). Unlike in other usages of the term, setting is used by socioculturalists not as an inert backdrop against which action is played out, but as something that is experienced subjectively; every person has a different experience and this experience is changing moment by moment, as Rogoff puts it: ‘people change through transforming their participation in sociocultural activities in which both the individual and the rest of the world are active’ (Rogoff, 1998, p.266). Following Lave, I understand setting to refer to a complex network of relationships, involving different planes of mediation. For example, cultural tools are understood in Lave’s view as an aspect of what she labels the constitutive order. People use and adapt cultural tools in relation to others in the context of particular institutional frameworks, designated as arenas by Lave.

Consequently classroom tasks need to be understood as activities, which in no sense stand alone, but have emerged as ideas because of connections with previous activities and my perception of how children have engaged with them. I will also be considering future possibilities, alongside awareness of the social, historical and political forces that shape and are in their turn shaped by the activities I enact in my classroom. Nespor (1997 in Murphy and Ivinson, 2003, p.187) describes settings within schools using Lave’s analysis

of how the different planes of mediation are linked in a complex of dialectical relationships as: 'intersections in social space, knots in a web of practices that stretch into complex systems beginning and ending outside the school'.

Solomon et al., (2008) have added to the analytic complexity by focusing on relationships between space, identity and learning. Their study was carried out in adult work places, but is relevant to wider application because sociocultural views of learning understand it to be ongoing in the normal course of life (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Solomon et al.'s 'hybrid spaces' (p.77) offers the possibility that space can be constituted within settings for new ways of negotiating meaning by participants, where the tension of institutional governing, judgements, accountabilities and hierarchical positions is more relaxed. This will be an important consideration, because the learning relationships the research is seeking to develop will be unique as a cultural practice (Miller and Goodnow, 1995) within the school arena.

Thinking of classroom work in terms of practice is useful. As Miller and Goodnow (1995, p.6) point out, 'practices refers to what people do - action that is situated in a context and open to interpretation'. This view of practice draws together features from how the term has been used in several disciplines and theoretical perspectives, with the qualifiers social or cultural being added. Miller and Goodnow's definition emphasises the routine or repeated quality of the actions within practices. But they go beyond that to consider practice as a community enterprise: practices carry normative expectations; they include value-systems, 'about what is natural, mature, morally right, or aesthetically pleasing'; actions become part of a group's identity; people learn the practice, develop the values, alongside a sense of belonging and identity within the community. Working with my classes, to develop a sense of community will therefore be an important aspect of my study. Socioculturalists understand learning as movement deeper into practice. The learning process is about using the resources made available in the practice to develop

competency. Learning is thus a matter of becoming more competent and at the same time a matter of belonging since as one develops competency one becomes more centrally engaged in the practice.

Wenger (1998) when he uses the term practice refers simultaneously to the pursuit of a particular enterprise and the attendant social relations. When he connects practice to community he is signalling how, over time, and with sustained involvement in particular enterprises, practices may be perceived as belonging to particular groups of people. As communities of people engage in wide-ranging activities they conceive of these within a single overall purpose, a joint enterprise; this is why it is important to think of activities as part of a practice, activities have a particular historical and social context (Wenger, 1998). Studying particular practices includes examining the explicit as well as the tacit. Attention has to be paid to the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contracts, as well as tacit arrangements, subtle cues, untold rules of thumb, embodied understandings, underlying assumptions and shared world views. In my study, I am part of a community of practice in that I teach as a member of a school staff. As such, I share consciously or subconsciously in these aspects of practice. It will be difficult, though important, for me to raise my awareness of how they function, particularly in view of how arena practices are part of the dialectic in my setting. Enquiring into particular practices is challenging in that a complexity of activities and relationships, in a constant state of flux are embedded within them: 'Things have to be done, relationships worked out, processes invented, situations interpreted, artefacts produced, conflicts resolved' (Wenger, 1998, p.49).

In supporting the development of writing as an activity within a practice, my central goal is the facilitation of negotiation of meaning. Meaning is always subjective and locally produced, moment by moment. This is why the routine use of Mercer's (2000, p.163) key question 'What do you think?' within our classroom practice during 2005/2006 was such a

catalyst for change. Though I did not understand it in this way, at the time, I now understand, following Wenger, that I was affording them opportunities for reification (Wenger, 1998). In responding to this question, children individually and collectively were encouraged to reflect on their engagement in activity and express their understanding of it in some concrete form, such as in words or pictures. Such reification supports learning as a part of ongoing practice since meaning emerges in the dynamic relationship of living in the world.

Wenger has developed three foundational concepts that support analysis of particular practices: negotiation of meaning, participation, and reification. Being engaged in a practice is a matter of negotiation of meaning, which is a two-fold interactive process between participation and reification. As a teacher, setting about the work of orchestrating particular practices in my classroom, I need to think about how I am affording meaning-making. At a very basic level this can be a matter of asking my learners, 'Does that make sense?' rather than the more usual question heard in classrooms, 'Do you understand?' The difference is a matter of recognising the agency of each person, be they teacher or child to be engaged in an active process of producing meaning, rather than the idea that the teacher dispenses knowledge which the child receives. Agency is the realised potential to act on the world purposefully, and other people may either help or hinder this. It is crucial that children's agency is supported since agency is closely linked to identity; the person you become is dependent upon the forms of participation that are open to you. Attention needs to be paid to the meanings that children are making both by the teacher and the children to afford this agency. Negotiation of meaning is Wenger's way of referring to human engagement in all kinds of general everyday activities. Everything we do involves a process of meaning-making, precisely because everything we do is a social interaction. I find it to be a concept that is pregnant with possibilities for classroom practice. His analysis offers much for me to ponder as to how I can enrich the opportunities I provide for

children in the tasks I set. Part of my role will be to model negotiation processes and guide children so that they develop in how they make connections between past experiences and evolve new ones. Sometimes the process may involve language, and sometimes not.

Cook and Brown (1999, see Figure 2.2 below) have made an important contribution to sociocultural thinking in developing theory around this concept of negotiation of meaning. They examine the relationship between different aspects of the concepts of knowledge and of knowing. They propose that knowledge is thought of as existing in four components: explicit, tacit, individual and group. Each of these four is taken to be distinct and coequal, doing work the others forms cannot do. They also argue for raising the profile of knowing. This would mean that knowledge and knowing would be viewed as mutually enabling, and not competing. This is to say that knowledge would be positioned as a tool of knowing. Knowing would be seen as an aspect of interaction with the social and physical world. The interplay of knowledge and knowing can generate new knowledge and new ways of knowing. They refer to this process as a generative dance. It is to this generative dance that I need to pay attention to notice how the children in my community of practice create and draw on the shared resources of our practice.

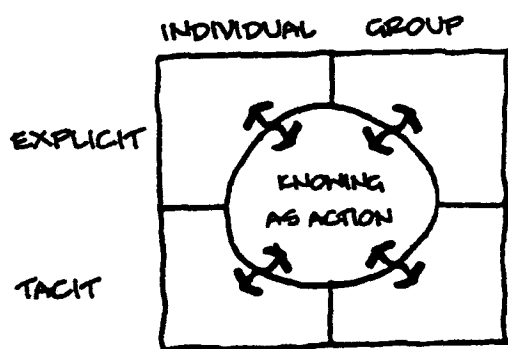


Figure 2.2 Generative Dance (Cook and Brown, 1999, p.383)

Cook and Brown's generative dance links to the Rogoffian notion of participatory appropriation, summarised by Rogoff (1995, p.151) as: 'the process by which individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for activities through their own

participation.’ Participatory appropriation implicates children’s active participation itself as being the process by which children gain facility in an activity, and hence move deeper into practice. It is a different way of thinking of learning from the concept of internalisation where learning is viewed as something static, whether skills or knowledge, passing across a boundary into an individual brain. Membership of a community is the condition for learning and development as part of that community. Trajectories of participation can be tracked for individuals as they participate through time within communities. As individuals work with others an ongoing process of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) unfolds, as individuals develop ways to engage, and relate to others in the community. Furthermore individuals exercise membership of a number of different communities of practice, each calling for different lived identities, and each offering different positional identities (Holland et al., 2008). Sociocultural views of knowledge therefore focus on the emergent, on what is known in practice, evidenced in the study, by how individuals contribute in activities, including how they transform their behaviour, and how the activity itself changes as a consequence. These key aspects of a sociocultural understanding of identity in learning need to be examined in order to track the learning trajectories of individuals and to uncover what appears to be formative in that experience of movement.

This process of evolving forms of mutual engagement is one of three essential dimensions that characterise the activities of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). A second dimension is part of the mutual engagement experience as people work together to develop an understanding of the joint enterprise. Wenger has studied the connections between individual engagement and overall communities’ goals, purposes and values. This is a highly complex process. Wenger uses terms like struggle and conflict when discussing this essential understanding and tuning of enterprises. Successful communities of practice learn together to hold each other accountable to their emerging interpretation of

what they understand their enterprise to be about. Wenger has also identified a third dimension that characterises the activities of communities of practice: they develop localised, shared repertoire, styles and discourses. These are seen in how a community negotiates the meaning of its various tools, artefacts and representations, how it records and recalls events, what kind of processes are at work as new terms are invented, or old ones are redefined or abandoned, what kind of stories circulate within a community and the role these stories play in retellings, as well as how routines are created and discontinued. These three dimensions will inform the development of learning through participation in my classroom community.

As individuals transform their understanding and their roles as participants, their identity is simultaneously changing. Wenger (1998) argues that individual trajectories may in broad terms be described as inbound, as a person becomes more and more invested in the community of practice and their contribution is increasingly valued by other members of the community; outbound as individuals change in how they relate to other members of the community, how others view and relate to them, and how they think of themselves in relation to the community and to the wider environment. It is also possible that an individual maintains an identity that is peripheral either by choice or necessity. This peripheral involvement may be an important part of the person's identity in some of the communities in which they participate. Legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is a tool that allows consideration of the individual as part of the community; it provides a way for individual trajectories to come into view without lapsing into the perspective that sees the individual as separate from the environment.

Many of the elements Wenger outlines as being components of the life of a community of practice also appear in Rogoff's summaries of the features of communities of learners (Rogoff et al., 2001). For example, Rogoff points out the importance of peers acting as resources for one another. She notes that it is likely that novices differ in

expertise, which means that potentially there is great value to be had from providing opportunities in the classroom arrangements I make for children to aid and challenge each other. Also clear in Rogoff's account of how a community of learners can be developed in the classroom is that children need a sense of classhood, to feel a part of the group, with a sense of responsibility to it. She draws on Lewis's (1995, in Rogoff, 2003) research in Japanese elementary schools, where teachers delegated considerable responsibility within the classroom and worked tirelessly to develop peer group structures among the children. In reviewing this research, Rogoff (2003) points out that the adoption of specific techniques drawn from the Japanese system may not help and could be counterproductive without examining how specific procedures fit together in cultural systems of values and practices. The creation of a community of learners is unique; cultural tools developed elsewhere may be of some service but a process of negotiation of meaning must accompany their introduction, use and modification in a new setting.

Understanding AfL : theory and practice

This section connects the general theorising about learning and pedagogy to formative assessment practice to examine the congruencies and conflicts with a sociocultural perspective.

AfL as theorised

AfL has become a dominant educational theme in recent years, largely due to the influence of Black and Wiliam's review of some 250 documents related to it (Black and Wiliam, 1998a). The central claim that created such interest then and which has since led to the development of AfL as something of 'a growth industry in the last seven years' (Black, 2005, p.133) was that measurable learning gains result from its implementation. After testing a number of strategies that appeared to be particularly effective in promoting learning, in a subsequent research project Black and Wiliam (2003, p.633) were able to

state: ‘although we do not yet know everything about “what works” in teaching, we believe that there is a substantial consensus on the kinds of classrooms that promote the best learning.’

Despite the rhetoric, it was by no means clear what the implementation of AfL in any specific classroom would entail. Black and Wiliam (1998a, p.15) wrote persuasively:

If the substantial rewards of which the evidence holds out promise are to be secured, this will only come about if each teacher finds his or her own ways of incorporating the lessons and ideas that are set out above into her or his own patterns of classroom work.

The lack of clarity regarding specific application can be traced back to the very wide range of research reviewed. When an individual article is examined in detail, it is difficult to determine how its findings might generalise to other contexts. One such example is (Fontana and Fernandes, 1994). This report is of particular significance since the pupils involved included some of similar age to the children in my study. Two outstanding elements were identified: a focus on self-assessment within the context of a constructivist classroom. Black and Wiliam were unsure which of these might have accounted for improved scores, or whether both had operated in tandem. Black and Wiliam (1998a, p.10) provide some detail about the practice of self-assessment during the intervention. Children were provided with:

- a) Details of the learning objectives to be reached and of the criteria for assessing these objectives;
- b) Opportunities to choose learning tasks to meet these objectives;
- c) Scope for monitoring and assessing outcomes

It could be argued that the inclusion of b) (above) is likely to enrich the classroom environment and widen the range of learning opportunities. There is no detail given about the classroom environment of the ‘control’ pupils so it is not possible to know whether condition b) did have such an enriching influence. A further interesting aspect of this report is the extensive training of teachers (some twenty two-hour sessions during two

terms with classroom observation and weekly reporting back to Fernandes on the use of the techniques with discussion around 'any problems that might have arisen in relation to them') (Fontana and Fernandes, 1994, p.412). It raises a question: is it training or the technique that impacts? It may have been the case that the training required teachers to reflect on their teaching and to focus on pupils.

Black and Wiliam (1998a) did not offer specific guidance to teachers on classroom formative assessment practice. They argued they could not do this because not enough was known about classroom practicalities within the context of English schools. They state that each teacher must find his or her own way of incorporating the lessons and ideas that are set out above into her or his own patterns of classroom work. They proposed that a pilot scheme be run in specific schools so teachers could work out how to improve classroom formative assessment and peers could learn from them. The forty-eight secondary science and mathematics teachers who engaged with the researchers in KMOFAP were set the task of selecting ideas from the 1998 review and developing their own practical application with some of their classes. The researchers rejected the notion of themselves adopting a training role.

KMOFAP was reported as confirmation of the value of a range of specific strategies in contributing to the raising of standards (Black et al., 2002). Change in classroom practice was viewed as essential, and six aspects requiring change were specified. These related to teachers' use of questioning, the ways in which teachers marked children's work, encouraging children to use peer- and self-assessment, as well as using summative assessment for formative purposes. The learning environment itself was viewed as requiring change, so as to become a place where children were encouraged to express and discuss their own understanding. The researchers also argued that classroom roles and expectations would need to be changed, so as to empower children to become active learners, taking responsibility for their own learning.

Outline advice was offered in this booklet (Black et al., 2002), on how each of these changes might be broached. Examples of approaches taken by the KMOFAP teachers were offered. For example, in advocating peer- and self-assessment, one such example was the use of a device known as ‘traffic lights’, where children were encouraged to assess their understanding by labelling, using traffic-light colours, green, amber or red. The researchers summarised their findings in lists of guidelines, for example, the following points comprise their recommendations for improving classroom practice of peer- and self-assessment (Black et al., 2002, p.12):

- The criteria for evaluating any learning achievements must be made transparent to students to enable them to have a clear overview both of the aims of their work and of what it means to complete it successfully. Such criteria may well be abstract, but concrete examples should be used in modelling exercises to develop understanding;
- Students should be taught the habits and skills of collaboration in peer-assessment, both because these are of intrinsic value and because peer-assessment can help develop the objectivity required for effective self-assessment;
- Students should be encouraged to keep in mind the aims of their work and to assess their own progress toward meeting these aims as they proceed. Then they will be able to guide their own work and so become independent learners.

In a final section, the researchers challenged the reader directly by suggesting that individual teachers might begin to try out some of the ideas for themselves:

Wholesale change can be too risky and demanding, so it is often best to think of one thing you feel confident to try - be it ‘traffic lights’, peer-assessment, improved questioning, whatever - and simply try it.

I have referred to my own efforts to investigate self- and peer-assessment, in response to this and how AfL was introduced within the Northern Ireland Curriculum as a set of strategies or procedures.

The 1998 review offered little by way of theoretical underpinning for formative assessment. It was later, during KMOFAP, that some theoretical ideas began to emerge (Black et al., 2003, p.77). The following four requirements are listed:

- the need to start from a learner's existing understanding;
- the need to involve the learner actively in the learning process;
- the importance of metacognition, which calls both for a judgement of one's present understanding and for a clear view of the purpose of the learning and of the criteria for judging achievement of that purpose;
- the importance of the social element of learning which is made effective through interaction in discussion.

The final point is expanded with reference to Vygotsky:

It is by talking about their thinking as it emerges that thinking is reinforced and developed: external and social activities are gradually internalised by the child as he comes to regulate his own intellectual activity.

At the end of this short section the conclusion is reached: 'Formative assessment provides ways for teachers to create classrooms that are more consistent with the research on learning'.

This short list of points is rather limited in its representation of 'how learning is understood in the light of recent research' (p.78). The reader is assured: 'It is clear that our findings are entirely consistent with a broad range of research in education and psychology. Any study of how learning is understood in the light of recent research will emphasize the importance of the issues raised in this chapter'. Reference is made to Wood (1998 in Black et al. 2003) and National Research Council (1999 in Black et al. 2003). It

is important to note that Wood writes as a psychologist and in this book addresses Vygotsky but not sociocultural theory. These claims are confident, but are difficult to substantiate. It really depends which recent research one reads. If, for example, one studies Rogoff (1990) or Wenger (1998) one will find some of these statements problematic. The first of the points may be compared with Rogoff's work on intersubjectivity, although for Rogoff the concept of internalisation is a problematic one. The second point makes little sense in a sociocultural context since 'learning' is assumed to be taking place in the normal course of life (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Even the routines one carries out have to be newly negotiated and that involves mutual meaning-making between oneself, cultural tools, and others. Furthermore, this statement seems to imply a distinction between the learner and the learning process. This is a distinction challenged by views of distributed cognition.

The third point refers to metacognition. This is a term that is used differently in different contexts, depending upon one's view of mind. The term seems to be attributed to Brown (1987 in Black and Wiliam, 2006, p.126) and Black summarises its intent as: 'reflection, leading to a strategic approach to one's work guided by a clear view of its goals'. This view of metacognition assumes a process wherein learners engage in thinking about specific subject knowledge. Murphy and Iverson (2005, p.197) challenge this notion when they argue: 'salience, i.e. what teachers and students take note of, is a function of both the condition of mind of the perceiver and the properties of the object being assessed'. Attempting to support learners towards 'a clear view' of learning goals, must take account of the knowledge students are bringing into settings. When account is taken of gender processes, for example, Murphy and Iverson show that learning criteria stated in terms that appear to have no human social relevance may not be valued by girls. Such girls will therefore engage in a very different process of reflection to that which is implied as purely cognitive and subject knowledge specific.

A second difficulty I have with this view of metacognition is the connection made with independent learning. This emphasis is challenged by distributed views of cognition. The focus on the individual that is everywhere apparent within dominant views of AfL appears to take little account of the social nature of classroom environments. Even though they refer to Vygotsky they do not take into account his basic tenet of the primacy of social meanings and individuals' understanding being derivative; as he put it, 'the very mechanism underlying higher mental functions is a copy from social interaction; all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships' (Vygotsky, 1981, p.164).

In the Northern Ireland context, AfL, is proposed as a means of promoting metacognition in pupils. Teachers are encouraged to explore ways of having their students think about how they learn, for example the use of the formula 'We are learning to ..' (see e.g. Clarke, 2001) is recommended (CCEA, 2006). Typically, learning intentions, or goals, outcomes or objectives (the terminology varies) are established prior to the commencement of an activity. A list summarising the criteria by which achievement of this learning can be measured, is also displayed. At the end of the activity, these success criteria can be used to decide to what extent the learning intentions have been achieved. New goals for the next activity can then be set.

Fundamental to AfL is the idea of separating learning from thinking about learning. This assumes a local view of mind, which is challenged in sociocultural theory. Rogoff et al. (2003) discuss this metaphor of the mind as a receptacle of knowledge or skill in relation to the development of factories in US industry. Information is broken into bits to be delivered in a specified sequence, like an assembly line. Knowledge or skills would thereafter become available for transfer into other contexts. This kind of reductionism, in which human action is understood to be undertaken to achieve narrowly defined goals, was noted by Lave (1988) to be a feature of traditional cognitive theory.

Hence the measure of the quality of children's writing is envisaged in AfL as a process of evaluating written pieces against success criteria. Evaluating quality differs in a sociocultural view as it takes account of individual trajectories rather than a single specified trajectory. This is an epistemologically different position. Writing is not about product but about performance - what pupils can do. The criteria are different. The ways of acting to move more deeply into practice that formative practices need to address are concerned with the power of writing to challenge the thinking of its audience. It lies within the capacity of every person to write in a way that provides this kind of challenge because writing is a creative act and each piece of writing is unique. In sociocultural terms, the writer is validated within the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as his or her work becomes a structuring resource (Lave, 1988) for joint production. Writing is primarily an expression of narrative construal, an expression of meaning-making, so that it is read within the community of practice by its members with a view to understanding the individual and who they are as well as contributing to the joint production of the community of practice.

Bruner (1986) writes of how from their earliest years, children seem to use language out of a 'drive to explore and to overcome ambiguities in the meaning of utterances' (p.64). This work has been observed as ongoing, not only in exchanges with others but in personal monologues. Bruner ponders:

The realm of meaning, curiously, is not one in which we ever live with total comfort. Perhaps it is this discomfort that drives us finally to construct those larger-scale products of language - drama and science and the disciplines of understanding - where we can construct new forms in which to transact and negotiate this effort after meaning.

Writing meets a fundamental need for humans to make sense of ourselves and the world in which we live. With this view writing becomes a central practice so that every opportunity is provided for children to explore narrative. It is information about this and about practices associated with this that need to be made available to the children to promote

their learning. Strategies to support this might be: sharing stories, guiding children to respond to the stories of their peers; giving opportunities for extensive writing on subjects of the children's own choosing; sharing my own feedback to individuals within the practice; while at the same time seeking to develop the technical power of the writing and the facility the children have to write in various genres. Hall (2004, p.82) underscores the importance of providing 'authentic opportunities for reading, writing and talk'. Her research into the work of outstanding literacy teachers indicates that for children to engage with writing it must appear as 'meaningful to them in the here and now of their lives'. Such teachers view themselves as enablers. They closely observe their learners so as to uncover what they already know and can do in various literacy contexts, and what motivates and engages them.

My original goal to explore formative assessment in supporting the development of children as writers has changed as my understanding of what I am looking for in terms of the development of children as writers has deepened. Initially my views were largely influenced by policy approaches to writing, so that I would have identified progress in writing by recourse to 'level descriptors' in the Northern Ireland Programme of Study (DENI Department of Education for Northern Ireland, 2005) or with reference to the First Steps programme as adopted by the Northern Ireland Strategy for Literacy (DENI 1998). Julianne, as literacy co-ordinator, wrote a writing scheme, in collaboration with staff that incorporated the existing writing curriculum each year group had evolved alongside the First Steps approach. Also included was an important sentence: 'Children will have opportunities to write in a variety of narrative styles of their own choice.' So in a way there was flexibility and the collegial way of working meant that teachers were positive about the introduction of First Steps. Staff training involved a lot of discussion with teachers sharing what they had tried out and how it had worked for them. There was recognition that it was difficult to make time for teaching such a range of genres.

The school's writing scheme focuses on children developing knowledge and skills. Genre theory has been criticised as being 'overly formulaic and mechanical, becoming what it was never intended to be - a knowledge-based model of learning' (Marshall 2004, p.105). Hall's (2004, p.63) criticism of the similar National Literacy Strategy, as being based on a 'narrow, singular conception of literacy' seems relevant. She is concerned, in the same way that we, as teachers, were concerned about literacy standards, but is thinking beyond the 'one size fits all' solution proposed by the Literacy Strategy to ask, 'What kind of literate person we need and wish to create through our school system?' She recognises the value of children developing greater awareness of any genre, but for her learning to read and write is as much about learning identities and values as it is about learning skills and codes.

Moss (1994, p.6) discusses high-stakes assessment and the evidence for its impact on educational practice. Standardised assessments can neither document nor promote certain intellectual activities, including encouraging students to find their own purposes for reading and writing. Hence there is a need to find ways to document the validity of assessments that support a wider range of valued educational goals. Teacher assessment is recognised as valid within NI policy, however the level descriptors are narrowly framed and therefore work against teachers paying attention to the meaning children are making in their writing. Hall (2004, p.68) recommends widening them: 'in the light of the broader conception of literacy outlined here'.

I now view this writing scheme as part of the constitutive order of the schooled arena (Lave, 1988). It is insufficient to meet the fundamental needs of the children to learn to use writing to shape their meanings and to experience the power of writing to shape their thinking. My goal will be to bridge between these structuring resources and the needs of the children to narrate their own experience (Ricoeur, 1984). This will be in contrast to the school's approach which is to teach creative writing in such a way that particular pieces of

writing are treated as learning tools awarded praise or correction by the teacher, or assessed formatively with a view to supporting individual development along a single learning pathway.

The relationship between the activities children engage in, in the pursuit of learning and the abstraction of terms that relate to that learning is also problematised by sociocultural theory. When children engage in practice, they experience the world and their engagement in it as meaningful. Wengerian negotiation of meaning, envisages a dualistic process working between participation and reification. Whereas if a teacher introduces a reification e.g. in the formula 'We are learning to ..' (or in the form of the acronym WALT, which is then used to create a display known as a WALT Board in the classroom) without engaging in negotiation a new challenge to meaning-making is created but not recognised. This is what happens when AfL is understood as a procedural rather than a fundamental change in practice. The realisation of meaning is not straightforward; we attend to an experience and we adjust to it. There is always contingency in this process. The process contains interpretation and action, doing and thinking, understanding and responding. The idea that one can tell a class they will learn such and such appears to be a rather different one from Rogoff's observations on intersubjectivity, which address the work of agentive learners focused on an emergent sense of a shared endeavour and supporting the structuring of an activity to achieve them.

As Wenger points out, reification is double-edged; potentially its evocative power may afford negotiated expansion of meaning, however it is never more than a constituent element of meaning. Furthermore, Wenger is careful to point out that it is not intended that reifications are abstract. Therefore, the use of what has become one of the visual hallmarks of AfL, WALT Boards, would not easily be incorporated within a sociocultural approach to learning and teaching and this will influence my approach to policy and institutional procedures that reflect this. If a narrowly framed set of learning goals is

proposed these must be taken to be in the nature of structuring resources which contribute to the setting within which the learners engage as whole persons in action (Lave, 1988).

Boud et al. (2008) make an argument that is also relevant to this discussion. They stress the importance for learning of the learner developing an expectation of what is required. They argue that this is rarely specified in explicit terms (and I would argue that even if it is, it is the learner's interpretation that governs their behaviour); what is required of the learner is embedded in a vocational practice or a particular context. Therefore there is learning work to be done in identifying what counts as good work from a complex set of surroundings and in developing ways of applying such an understanding to one's own work. Boud et al. (2008) are concerned that this work of determining standards is part of the learning process and if teachers provide the standards, as the sharing of success criteria is felt to do, children will not have practice in developing this skill. What I want to provide for my learners are extended routine opportunities to problem-solve (Lave, 1988).

Further theorising on AfL has recently been developed by Black and Wiliam (2006). They propose an eclectic approach; for example, Wenger's (1998) notion of communities of practice is rejected as a representation of the classroom, while at the same time considered a worthwhile analytical tool in considering peer-assessment. The authors' claim to have set out a theory of formative assessment is overstated; an opportunity to set about the construction of a convincing, cohesive theoretical framework, which goes deeper than the pedagogical and begins to grapple seriously with alternative views, would appear to have been lost. For example, no consideration was given to how Lave and Wenger theorise change; Black and Wiliam's rejection of Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of community of practice as a representation of the classroom on the grounds that it is not a conceptual framework that 'provides for the activities of agents to change the structure' (p.83) is not convincing. This claim is supported with reference to the example Wenger uses from claims processing. Black and Wiliam deduce from this that 'the world of claims

processing is hardly changed at all by the enculturation of a new individual' (Black and Wiliam 2006, p.83). No further argument is offered.

Wenger is not claiming to present research to build a case; he is illustrating a theory by drawing on ethnographic field work. It is descriptive and not explanatory, nor does he search for change. Furthermore Black and Wiliam are talking about change in a classroom, which is a different matter from considering settings which are dynamic and emergent. That is to say that what would change would be the understanding, shared but probably tacit, of the group's activities, what Cook and Brown (1999) refer to as the process of the generative dance. The meeting of minds within the community of practice is a negotiating encounter: it involves both shaping and being shaped. The dynamic within the community of practice is a three-fold one of learning, transformation and change, which are 'always implicated in one another' so that 'the status quo needs as much explanation as change' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.57).

However Black and Wiliam argue that the 'activity system' of Engeström (1987, cited in Black and Wiliam, 2006, p.83) is more productive as a starting point for the analysis of the classroom because of its emphasis on 'tensions, disturbances and local innovations' which 'are the rule and the engine of change' (Salomon, 1993, p.8 in Black and Wiliam, 2006, p.83). They use Engeström to capture the mediation of settings at arena level. In my study, I foreground settings because I want to capture some of the moments in action that emerge in the generative dance where shared thinking can be guided and made available for individual participatory appropriation i.e. for individuals to move through understanding. This movement I refer to as formativity. Black and Wiliam (2006, p.89), on the other hand, focus on the interaction between an individual learner and his or her teacher, while recognising that this is theoretically problematic:

The teacher needs to understand the way students think and the way in which they take in new messages both at general (subject discipline) and specific (individual) levels.

The problem is that this calls for a theory relating to the mental processes of students which does not yet exist (although some foundations have been laid: see Pellegrino, et al., 2001).

Afl in Northern Ireland curriculum

The NIC was introduced to all primary school teachers in Northern Ireland as a one-day programme providing an overview of the new emphases and shifts in thinking. One session was devoted to an introduction to AfL. The facilitator on the day I attended, in October 2006, referred to AfL in terms of the Assessment Reform Group research (Black and Wiliam, 1998a) and recommended the two pamphlets, (Black and Wiliam, 1998b) and (Black et al., 2002) as well as (Clarke, 2005) as a way into the subject. She explained that it had been the subject of ‘vast research’ over a ten-year period. After a brief listing of bullet points comparing the familiar summative assessment with the new formative assessment an exercise was carried out during which we as participants had an opportunity to experience a problem for learners if AfL is not enacted.

Having explored how AfL might be understood in a sociocultural context such an approach appears rather trivial, static, and one-dimensional. Learning is characterised in terms of narrowly defined checklists of objectified knowledge, skills, or understanding. The social nature of learning that sees it as transforming the nature of participation of individuals so the practice itself is transformed is not taken into account. Furthermore, the claim that AfL has been the subject of ‘vast’ or ‘extensive research’ is questionable. The research base for AfL in the UK is a narrow one. Research based on the experience of teachers who assume a situated view of cognition, for example is not represented. On the other hand, the Northern Ireland version of AfL, which claims as its basis the Black and Wiliam review claims a foundation in a constructivist view of learning (CCEA, 2006).

Developing a sociocultural view of formative assessment

Pryor and Crossouard's (2007) article is significant for the study, as one of the few publications that explicitly develops a sociocultural view of formative assessment. They challenge the assumption in Black and Wiliam's (1998a) review that formative assessment is necessarily a good thing. In particular, they are critical of current AfL practice. Instead they outline a much more complex theoretical approach. Pryor and Crossouard's approach draws upon their experience as sociologists. The result is that their theorising of formative assessment is limited in the extent to which they theorise practice by recourse to sociocultural principles. An important emphasis in Pryor and Crossouard's (2007) work is how language is used within the formative assessment process. In examining this process of negotiating meaning they build on earlier work (Torrance and Pryor, 2001) which explored how teacher-researchers engaged their students in formative assessment.

This earlier study found that the most valuable contribution to learning seemed to come from the process of clarification, as the teacher-researchers put it, of quality criteria within a particular task. This appears to have been a process in which these teachers engaged with their students in seeking agreement as to how a task could not simply be completed successfully but could be performed to a higher standard. Formative assessment had enabled a new process to be enacted in the classroom as learners and teachers together negotiated words to express aspirations within particular tasks. This focus on process is absent in the AfL literature. It is represented diagrammatically (see Figure 2.3), with a central place accorded to understandings of the task and quality criteria. The diagram is not meant to suggest a linear process, but rather one that is sequential and recursive.

Pryor and Crossouard relate formative assessment to the narrative production of identities. They argue, drawing on Ricoeur (1991, in Pryor and Crossouard, 2007), that narrative is a means by which we both construct ourselves and give structure and sense to

the world. This is important in a sociocultural view since learning is viewed as a process of changing identities of participation. They argue that formative assessment functions as a way for the teacher, in the role of significant narrator, to support learners in making connections between classroom practices and institutional discourses: ‘Formative assessment aims to raise students’ critical awareness both of the discourses of the educational setting and also of the wider social construction of these discourses’ (p.10). They suggest that teachers construct an additional discourse, labelled as meta-discourse (see Figure 2.3), so learners might be encouraged to see their practices and their texts as

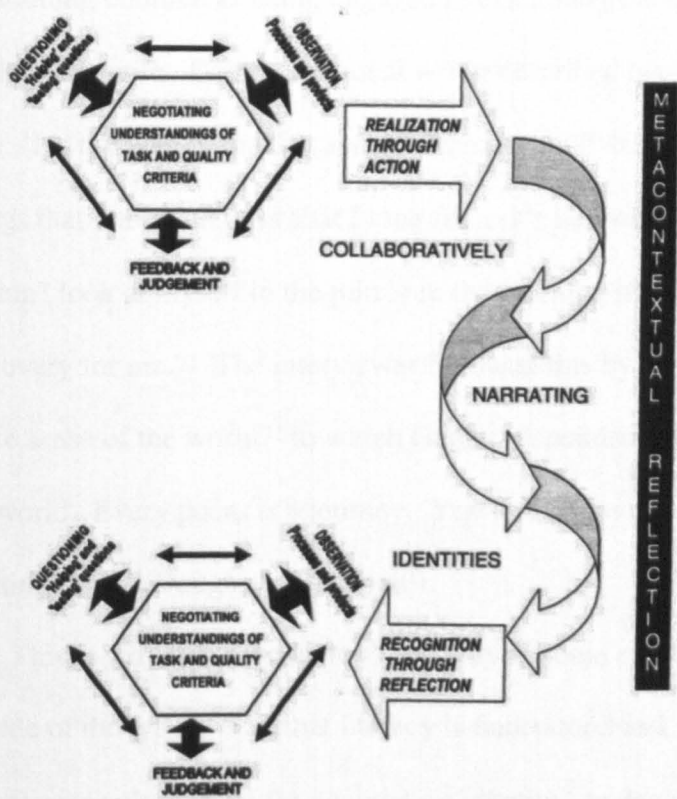


Figure 2.3 A sociocultural model of formative assessment (Pryor and Crossouard 2007, p.15)

products of current identities and beyond this to consider them in light of future or desired identities therefore narrating into being new identities through this collaborative production of different texts. Identity is performed and contested through discourse, through particular combinations of ways of speaking, acting and believing in settings, evolving

over time and space. Through this process, the tools of the practice are seen by students as important to them as they begin to see their generic potential to meet their needs.

This is an important insight for the study as it suggests the need to afford learners opportunities to collaboratively narrate their identities in terms of being writers as well as becoming writers. There is therefore something about being a person as well as something about being a writer that sociocultural teachers of young literacy learners have to address and that is why writing as narrative construal is so important and yet absent from many representations of writing (Bruner, 1996). Teachers tend to trivialise writing, rather than positioning children as being engaged in essentially the same meaning-making process as adults who write. One professional writer described her relationship with writing in this way: 'It's my way of making sense of things that I've lived and seen other people live, things that I'm afraid of or that I long for ... it's like what the poet Michael Donaghy said, "I couldn't look at myself in the mirror in the morning if writing poems was not a process of discovery for me."' The interviewer followed this by asking the question: 'You write to make sense of the world?' to which Garner responded: 'We write while making sense of the world. Every poem is a journey. You don't know where it is going to go - that is the exciting thing' (Dougary, 2010, p.40).

This is why narrative matters and why in some senses I am reconceptualising writing outside of the typical way that literacy is understood and represented in policy and in my school, as a cultural tool for negotiating identity. In developing the technical power of writing in the process of engaging with the cultural tool, children are learning about what it is to be considered literate; this means engaging them in community of practice tools, where the community of practice is becoming schooled learners of literacy, and involves the use of grammar, forms/genres, procedures of standard writing representations, skills etc. These are the reifications and are necessary as part of the shared repertoire of writing to enable the children to understand and develop competence in narrative construal. But in

distinguishing my practice from that of the school's I argue they are necessary, but not the end point, rather the means to enable the performance of narrative construal. The outcome may reflect competent use and understanding of these cultural tools but it is the impact of the outcome that matters, how it meets the joint enterprise of the community. Progress as represented in policy structures, however, reverses this and is defined in terms of the tools as the endpoint rather than the means.

Views on Writing

Graves (1983), has been influential on both sides of the Atlantic, in advocating a process approach to writing. This approach challenges the widespread practice of writing as a once or at most twice-weekly event in American classrooms, a practice which is also traditional in Northern Ireland primary classrooms and is the practice in my school. Graves (1983, p.90) argues that: 'writing taught once or twice a week is just frequently enough to remind children that they can't write, and teachers that they can't teach'. In his view, children need to have opportunity to write on most days of the week on subjects of their own choosing if they are to have a 'strong writing experience'. This resonates with a sociocultural view of learning in that expertise is something that develops over time and through participation. McDermott (1996, p.277) put it this way:

The term learning simply glosses that some persons have achieved a particular relationship with each other, and it is in terms of these relations that information necessary to everyone's participation gets made available in ways that give people enough time on task to get good at what they do.

The term process writing indicates that work with children is primarily concerned with the processes and purposes of writing and not with the products alone again distinguishing this from the practices in my school. For example, in classroom resource material, (Ellis and Friel, 1995, p.6), which is based on a process approach, three aspects of the writing process are prioritised:

- the writer's intention - issues such as purpose, voice and audience - this approach assumes the child is a writer who has a story that matters to him or her to tell, and a desire to provide the reader with an enjoyable experience;
- the craft skills of writing;
- awareness of how writers work and of the developing of personal work patterns and techniques.

But this is not to say that the processes are enacted and learned in a content vacuum. On the contrary, it is an approach that values the writing children produce by making connections between it and other curricular areas, such as drama and art, as well as with published writing. Graves (1983, p.7), for example, insists on strong links between reading and writing. The classroom environment should be arranged so as to 'surround the children with literature' and this, in his view, is not a simple matter of lining the shelves with books and reading stories, but goes beyond that so that teachers 'have children live the literature'. By which he does not simply mean involving them in literature-related classroom activities, such as choral speaking, role-playing and informal drama, but in activities that I would understand as enabling children to connect what they are doing to mature practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). He recommends, for example, that teachers invite authors, and share their own writing, reading with children about how authors compose, showing drafts and introducing children to the processes by which authors write. Such an approach would be effective from a sociocultural perspective because the teacher enacts a setting in which the cultural tools of writing are made available and can become part of the shared repertoire as practice emerges.

Graves includes within his definition of literature the writing that children themselves produce. This kind of respect for children as authors is rare. However, Graves (1983, p.66) would have 'no distinctions made between the reading of children's writing and the writing of professionals' so that 'both are treated as important writing' and both receive the same attention in terms of how their work is read, undergoing 'scrutiny' in a process of

‘receiving’ the work, discussing what is contained in the piece and formulating questions for the author. In the same way that Graves talks of ‘receiving’, Armstrong (2006, p.179) advocates, ‘inhabiting the work’.

Armstrong, like Graves, positions novice writers as being, from the beginning, participants. He argues that it is a mistake to think of education in terms of initiation of children into culture. He views the child as ‘cultural participant as well as cultural spectator’ (p.174) and discusses the production of story in terms similar to Bruner's externalisation tenet (Bruner, 1996). Armstrong (2006, p.167) asserts that: ‘by the time they compose their earliest written stories children have already acquired the practical understanding which narrative presupposes’. For Armstrong, this practical understanding is summed up in Ricoeur's (1984, p.55 in Armstrong, 2006, p.166) analysis as being a matter of: ‘familiarity with [concepts] such as agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, co-operation, conflict, success, failure etc’.

Based on this assumption, the basic stance of the teacher in relation to the pupil as writer is that of reader. This reorients the teacher's relationship in the formative assessment process as the reader has to negotiate meaning taking account of the writer's intentions, rather than against some specified external notion of successful writing for children of that age. Further it is a stance, which offers a radical challenge to institutional expectations as to my role in relation to children's writing.

Armstrong elaborates on the term reading so as to develop an analysis of how a teacher might approach this as a process, which he labels as ‘the act of reading’. In this act, he envisages four aspects of scrutiny in the study of children's narrative works which may be thought of as four moments in the process of interpretation:

- **Inhabiting the work and the world which it represents and projects:** This involves acknowledging the authority of the writing, however elementary the work may

initially appear. His belief is that the attentive reader will discern the writer's power to challenge his or her understanding;

- Drawing out the work's narrative intention: Look for the author's overt intentions as well as those implicit in the text. What intentions can be elicited by studying the language, the form and content, thematic development? What underlying significance can be detected? What light is thrown on life, including the author's own sense of life?
- Re-describe or represent to the author her or his understanding of the work: This is envisaged as a one-to-one activity with the author, discussing either his or her own writing or books they are reading. Alternatively, it may be carried out collaboratively with other members of the class. This is a speculative activity involving sharing of perceptions and exchange of interpretations. At its heart lies the goal of coming in conversation to a broader understanding of narrative. It also changes the teacher's role as this is a process of modelling for the learner their intentions to come to a closer understanding of the meaning and quality of the product.
- Look to the future as implicit in the work of the present: This is also envisaged as teacher working with an individual or as a collective class activity. A wide range of possible foci for development is listed, with the guiding principle being sensitivity to 'existing equilibrium of skill and purpose in the children's work.' For example, verbal or grammatical skills, new genres or new techniques, introducing literature, which responds to the work in hand, further exploration of the subject matter and extension into other curricular areas are all offered as possibilities.

In this act of reading, Armstrong's intention is that the work, whether it be work in progress or final product is valued. He stresses that any attempt to render the work its due value is made visible through the documentation of individual and collective thinking

within the classroom workshop. This documentation may take many forms, such as individual portfolios, anthologies, wall displays, exhibitions of narrative work in a variety of media, public readings and performances, audio and video recordings, photos and computer programs. In this documentation, annotation in a variety of ways linked to display is important in making children's achievement visible to themselves and to others. Interpretive notes and comments, writing journals, recollections, reflections, proposals and projects, reading lists and such like may be displayed to offer annotation in this way. These annotations can be seen as versions of peer- and self-assessment as in the process strengths and values are recognised along with future possibilities for development. This is why this annotated documentation, in Armstrong's view, promotes further learning through reflection on the nature of that achievement.

For Armstrong the business of reading, or interpretation, is synonymous with assessment and evaluation. Although he does not use the term formative assessment, important connections can be made between the practices Armstrong advocates and some of the features of dominant forms of formative assessment. In the third of his 'moments in the process of interpretation', for instance, the collaborative involvement of peers is suggested. What I understand Armstrong to be envisaging here is a stage in process of interpretation that involves reading together and thinking together about a specific piece of writing. The involvement of peers in commenting on class work has been found valuable by those who have researched formative assessment. Ross et al. (1993, in Black et al., 2003, p.66), for example, note:

Students are capable of rich and sophisticated responses to and understandings of their own work and seem well able to develop these responses and understanding in collaboration with their conversation partner.

Teachers researching peer-assessment in the KMOFAP project found that their pupils progressively developed with their teachers a 'nose' for quality and became skilful in being

able to talk about what they considered good about a piece of work as well as why they considered it to be good. Whether or not this would be the case when working with younger children has not yet been researched. My earlier research suggested that the talking and listening skills required are not necessarily those that are valued and fostered currently in primary classrooms. However, Wenger (1998, p.81) has observed that where a community of practice is engaged in a joint enterprise shared understandings develop in terms of 'specialized sensitivities, an aesthetic sense, and refined perceptions that are brought to bear on making judgements about the qualities of a product or an action'. This is the tacit group knowledge referred to by Cook and Brown (1999). Participants negotiate the appropriateness of what they do in view of these tacit understandings, which develop as an integral part of the practice. Wenger notes that these matters 'may not be something that anyone can articulate very readily'.

One might speculate that articulating such matters may be more difficult for younger children than for the older pupils the KMOFAP teachers engaged with. Finding ways to have young children talk about each other's writing would also appear to be daunting in view of the fact that it is only in recent years that teachers have been required to consider what is good about a piece of writing. Statutory assessment at the end of each Key Stage in Northern Ireland requires teachers to assess particular pieces of writing in terms of level descriptors. A level descriptor is a written description of the features expected to characterise children's writing at particular points in their school career. The expectation for the age group I teach would be that most of the children will produce writing with Level 2 characteristics, while some may produce work judged to be Level 1 or Level 3. The following statements are taken from the Programme of Study for Writing and summarise the progression that is expected as children move from Level 1 to Level 3:

- from expressing ideas for the teacher to write towards writing with some independence in a variety of forms which show a sense of structure appropriate to the form, using some supporting detail to make the meaning clear;
- from spelling, in a recognisable way, common words and words that are important to them towards spelling such words correctly;
- from having some control over size and shape of letters towards handwriting that is accurately formed and consistent in size.

This is not an easy task and we have been advised to do this in terms of ‘best fit’. Teachers who are experienced in making these assessments tend to work intuitively in arriving at their judgements (Marshall, 2004). This is an example of how experience in particular practices supports people in developing tacit knowledge, or knowing-in-action, based on doing. The traditional teacher response to writing, on the other hand, has been to correct secretarial errors, with perhaps some rewording or rephrasing and adding a general comment at the bottom. Many teachers, even after years of experience reading children's writing find difficulty articulating what they like about it and why they like it.

A sociocultural perspective raises questions about the kind of shared thinking such assessment processes support. If, for example, teacher reifications focus on aspects of writing included in the bulleted points above, children will produce writing that matches those expectations, as they seek to bring their experience into line with what they will perceive as the expertise of the more experienced practitioner (Wenger, 1998). What Armstrong offers is another way of looking so that it is the meaning that children are making that is the focus of attention (Armstrong, 1994). This suggests that ways have to be found to engage with the children in Armstrong's act of reading so that they can come to a practised understanding of what writing entails as a joint enterprise. This emerging sense of the parameters of writing as our joint enterprise is what I hope to make available in the study. This gets at the heart of formativity as the shared thinking of the group is

made available through the generative dance (Cook and Brown, 1999) for individuals to appropriate, so they experience an enhanced sense of belonging as competent writers who are valued by their peers.

Dyson's (1989) research among young children has shown how the negotiation of meaning that takes place through the creation of pieces of writing is an ongoing social process. Underlying Dyson's study of young children is her assumption, following Vygotsky (1978, in Dyson, 1989), that written language is a complex social tool that functions in varied ways in society. Children, according to Dyson, learn about this tool - its purposes, its features, its processing demands - as they encounter it in meaningful activities. This has two implications for my practice: children need opportunities to write on subjects of their own choosing, as Graves has pointed out; and opportunities to negotiate the meaning of their writing, as well as that of the other members of our classroom community, including visiting authors, in terms of writing as a joint enterprise.

Dyson (1989, p.6) recognises the pre-eminence of talk as 'an accompaniment to and then an organizer of symbolic action'. She sees connections between drawing, talking and writing, as well as the responses children receive from their peers as they produce these. In my experience of schooled literacy the connections between these activities was a straightforward one: before writing began a discussion of the topic would take place, then writing would follow, and finally, if time allowed, illustration of the story could take place, depending on the age of the children. Dyson has a different way of understanding the connection between these activities, something she describes as a complex dialectic. Offering opportunities for children to be involved in other symbolic media, such as drawing, imaginative play, film, drama and storytelling is essential, in Dyson's view. This is because of their nature as shared enterprises, requiring ongoing definition by participants who continuously attune themselves to each other as well as to the world. The provision of a range of such activities caters for the needs of learners developing unique participatory

profiles, or identities. The process of capturing and communicating personal experiences that is at the heart of such activities is similarly key to success as a writer. It is in the response that the writer receives from the reader that competence is gauged. The problem-solving that characterises the art of writing is realised in the social interaction involved in its creation.

Researchers who have employed a process approach, such as Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) have attempted a general account of the nature of the writing development of children. One of the main ways in which this understanding has been garnered has been by conferencing with children, both before and after they write. Graves (1983, p.152), for instance, has made a careful study of the changes children make; he understands this to be something worth paying attention to since those changes 'reveal what children see in their writing'. He lists five of these changes in order of dominance, noting that children are able to make changes in most of the five areas right from the beginning of their writing careers: spelling, motor-aesthetic issues, conventions (punctuation, capitalisation), topic and information, and major revisions (addition and exclusion of information, reorganisation). This type of conferencing with children may have value as I develop my practice with my novice writers, however I would hope to create opportunities for children to develop a much more extensive shared repertoire than this. Whatever arrangements I can make for conferencing with children, I will use it as part of the shared meaning-making process that enables children to align their practice to our emergent sense of writing as a joint enterprise.

The kind of progression of development outlined in the NI Programme of Study offers at best a partial account. Armstrong (2006) provides tools which can be used to support children in developing individual trajectories. What those trajectories will look like, will become apparent during the study. Rogoff (1997, p.282) has offered a brief outline of the kind of questions that could profitably be considered in thinking about children's

movement deeper into writing practice. Her assumption, in framing these questions, is of assessment which is part of, rather than separate from, the writing situation. Her questions are therefore framed to support enquiry into the development of children in relation to how they are working with the involvement of support, including the teacher. How involved is the teacher in supporting in the writing activity? She asks whether children:

- Are at the point of needing assistance in becoming involved at all in writing, or write with interest of their own;
- Write only in response to requests to do so or initiate communication through writing;
- Embed writing in a very limited range of activities, or use it broadly?
- Consider the understanding that a reader will make of their written communication, or are they tied to writing for themselves alone?
- Take responsibility for editing their work for its meaning and its ease of being read, or is this a role that needs close support from another person?

Based on my review of the literature the focus of my research is represented as follows:

Refined research questions:

- What are effective practices and what is the evidence that these enable children to become more effective writers in a sociocultural view of writing as a cultural tool to enable narrative construal?
- What are the consequences for how a sociocultural approach positions a teacher in a system where formative assessment, at the level of the constitutive order and the arena, is predicated on a quite different conception of learning and of knowledge, one challenged by research?
- What are the implications, therefore, of a sociocultural approach to formative assessment (formativity) at the level of the experienced world, i.e. arena (school) and setting; and at the constitutive level, i.e. policy?

But new issues arising as the study progressed shaped how it evolved, and my research focus sharpened into the following two concerns.

Research focus

- I planned to enact a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning writing and, in so doing, intended to uncover what appears to be formative in that experience, by noting what supports children to move deeper into practice, and how that is evidenced in their actions, talk, interactions and products;
- Then I intended to chart my learning as a practitioner, that is to say, my becoming a sociocultural teacher.

Chapter 3 Research Rationale and Approach

To answer the research questions my approach will be ethnographic, though in a distinctly sociocultural way. Traditionally ethnography emphasises the importance of thick description in order to uncover variety and complexity. This is something which socioculturalists also value, and build on, by using sociocultural methodology to add depth, as well as breadth to description. For example, while socioculturalists select cases that are bounded in some important aspects, they regard particular cases as unbounded in other aspects in order to take dialectical relationships among differing planes of mediation into account. Following Rogoff (1990) all aspects of events have meaning and purpose central to their definition. This frees the research from any attempt to enquire into cognitive processes viewed separately from observable action; this is why enquiry into metacognition though it is a concept favoured in the AfL literature was rejected. Instead cognitive processes are assumed to be guiding, purposeful action and interaction, which is observable in the classroom.

Understanding of action and interaction can only be achieved by examining the specifics of circumstances, which is what a sociocultural approach offers; depth, as well as the traditional thick description of ethnography, is made available. To understand particular cases, account must be taken of social mediation, as well as of individual and group agency. It is for this reason that the research approach is referred to as a hybrid, mediational case study. The cases in the research are viewed as unbounded to bring into view different levels of social mediation. Lave's (1988) analysis provides a framework for examining settings in relation to both horizontal and vertical dimensions (Figure 2.1) and to explore the crucial issue of goals and purposes, for example, how they appear in terms of Lave and Wenger's (1991) teaching or learning curriculum, and how I experienced institutional shaping of my own practice.

A second related contribution made by socioculturalism to research methodology is the Rogoffian notion of three planes of analysis (Rogoff, 1995). Using this approach, an event may be viewed in terms of ongoing personal processes, as well as connected interpersonal and community processes. In foregrounding a particular plane, the other planes are not lost from view, but remain in the background. This makes it possible to uncover dialectical relationships among and between the various planes, which are mutually constituting. The main focus for the study is the interpersonal plane. My work with the children, enacting a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning writing involves orchestrating and examining interpersonal arrangements with the children. It is on this plane that formativity is emergent, because it is here that changes in individuals may be seen, as they participate in cultural activities. This has meant that I approach my study with an openness that expects to observe variation as individuals develop unique learning trajectories. By looking at children's ongoing contributions, it is possible to notice them transform, in terms of their understanding as well as their responsibility. The nitty-gritty, day-in-day-out relational work of the classroom is where I will observe how the children and I have structured situations and managed our own and each others' roles. Assuming the children to be agentive, I will be sensitive to enquiring into goals and purposes, the implicit and explicit, the emerging and routine, in tacit communication and the arrangements between children.

The classroom setting is understood as emergent within the affordances and constraints of the institutional structure, as well as the available cultural tools. It is by focusing on the community plane that this is made possible. This focus will enable cultural technologies related to the learning and teaching of writing to be examined. By enquiring into the cultural beliefs embedded within arena practices, such as ways of using exercise books or of marking stories, it is possible to notice ways in which these do or do not serve the needs of the children. Also available on the community plane, is how formative

assessment, in the form of AfL, was introduced into and became embedded in arena policy and practices. It is on the interpersonal plane that these arena policies and practice emerge, for example in conversations with staff colleagues. But it is by drawing on data from the community plane, that analytic connections can be made between what is said and the underlying institutional intentions.

When I began my research journey as a reflective teacher I shared Nutbrown's (2001, p.135) view that watching children is one of the essentials of teaching. When I first read her appeal that as educators we 'see what is really happening', I took this at face value, as a plea for more careful attention. I have come to understand that what one sees is determined by the lens through which one looks. This is why I am not making any claim for objectivity in presenting my data. My analysis is from a particular perspective, informed by the sources discussed in the literature review. This thesis is a construction of how I interpret the phenomena. In positivist and post positivist paradigms, an epistemological distinction could be drawn between the knower (the enquirer) and the known (or knowable). A teacher attempting research into her own practice would, in this view, have tried to select research methods in an effort to distance herself from what was viewed as the object of study. However, Lincoln (1990) argues convincingly for abandoning any attempt on behalf of the researcher to adopt the role of dispassionate observer. Instead she advocates being a passionate participant, with emphasis on connectedness, intense interaction and interactivity, on dialectical relationships; far from seeking to distance oneself, the researcher ought, in her view, to seek emotional and social commitment, reporting with energy and passion, rather than in dispassionate prose. As a classroom teacher engaging in research of her own practice there was no question of my attempting any kind of disengaged, dispassionate research stance. A researcher entering a classroom in the role of participant-observer may make decisions about the extent to which they will become involved in classroom interactions, but as teacher-researcher I was

central enactor of classroom practice; the research grew out of my stance as reflective practitioner and was primarily focused on understanding classroom issues in order to support improvement. The intention of the research is to open a window into my experience during the study by offering ‘situated self-observations’ (Douglas, 1976). These offer insight into formativity at the personal level, and allow reflection on how my learning as a sociocultural teacher was supported.

Research Design

The basic orientation of the research design is exploratory to provide a description that illuminates what formativity means socioculturally. In the beginning, I had no experience of mature sociocultural classroom practice and did not know how to enact a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning writing. I knew of no other sociocultural practitioners locally, where I might have been able to study what was formative. Furthermore in the school the intention was to implement the policy version of AfL with its assumptions about teachers, learning and children. For most of my colleagues AfL was unknown, but one of them, studying at master’s level carried out research in school, during the second year of my study, observing teachers working with AfL with their classes. He focused on the introduction of AfL into school, asking how uniform was the practice of formative assessment practices, given that teachers were expected to follow guidelines based on Clarke (2003) as outlined in the School Development Plan. This distanced his approach from mine and as I had already committed to my doctoral study, I had no choice but to develop my own practice and explore it. The study is therefore a case study, which is situated in a medium-sized primary school in a provincial Northern Ireland town. The research was carried out during three academic years: 2006/2007, 2007/2008 and 2008/2009 where I taught three successive Year 4 classes (children aged 7/8 years). As the aim of the research is to provide insights into effective practices and how I evolved as a

sociocultural teacher, data is drawn from before my doctoral study - from my first Y4 class 2005/2006 - to characterise the understanding I was moving through. Data from 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 examine how practice evolved and what characterised it and its consequences for children becoming writers and how formative assessment was reconceptualised. It also looks at the dialectical relationship between institutional practices in response to external pressures and my practice and how the latter was mediated, shaping the possibilities made available for me to practise in ways that I valued. Reference to changes in practice enacted during 2005/2006 is included, since my work as a reflective practitioner, building on research carried out during the previous year, extends insights into this relationship and my trajectory of learning. This addresses the second research question.

Research design is generally viewed as an ongoing process, and as I am researching my own evolving practice this is particularly so. Change, of course, is inherent in all settings; practice is always improvised anew. In my school, however, institutional policy changes were taking place, as the NIC with its emphasis on AfL was introduced. In turn arena practices were changing, which affected my practice. At the same time, I was reading sociocultural theory and engaging with other sociocultural practitioners and so was moving more deeply into sociocultural practice.

Initially as I worked with my Y4 class in 2006/2007 I adopted an action research approach, but gradually found that this approach did not support what I needed to do. Action research assumes classroom practice as a constant, into which some intervention is introduced and the resultant change can then be attributed to the intervention. A sociocultural approach rejects this assumption, viewing change as inherent, and social settings as in constant flux. Furthermore, action research in making causal connections between intervention and subsequent change affords no place for the dialectic, which is something a sociocultural approach brings into view; it takes no account of levels of

mediation. While the research focus was primarily on the interpersonal plane, which is the only plane open to view in a traditional action research model, mediation relating to the other Rogoffian planes needs to be taken into account in understanding interactional moments (Edwards, 2000). Socioculturalism places me centrally in practice as emergent in the generative dance (Cook and Brown, 1999). Hence to understand learning in the moment, the unit of analysis is activity, and on myself as participant. This overlaps with action research, but is distinctly different in the understanding of my role, and of the dynamic of practice.

Generalisation

The study reflects the spirit of Eisner (1990, p98), when he writes: 'what research yields is not to be regarded as dependable prescriptions for action but as analogues to increase the quality of teachers' deliberations'. Stake (1995) counters the assertion that case studies are not a suitable basis for generalisations. He distinguishes between naturalistic generalisations and formal (scholarly, scientific) generalisations. Naturalistic generalisations are the kind of generalisations people make in everyday life, which have value in guiding action, based on experience and tacit knowledge. The other generalisations 'rationalistic, propositional, law-like', Stake (1995, p.7) views as useful in some circumstances and harmful in others: 'Good generalizations aid the understanding of general conditions, but good generalizations can lead one to see phenomena more simplistically than one should.'

This is part of the problem with how AfL research has been used in formulating policy. Based on a positivist methodological philosophy (E891, Part 6), evidence of improved learning has been used to isolate causal variables, identified as particular teaching procedures. These procedures have then been enshrined in policy, with the expectation that using them will result in similar improved learning. This has a bearing on

the original conception of the research, as the implementation of formative assessment procedures. This aim was based on an assumption that research findings can be sequestered from the context in which they became visible to the researchers. What was overlooked was that the researchers found those procedures effective because of the lens through which they were looking. Furthermore, those procedures were developed in classrooms by teachers with their own views and values; unless I asked the epistemological question and examined the relationship between the position of the teacher and the AfL procedures, I would have no way of knowing to what extent adopting practices based on their experience might be possible for me. This then is the key to the thinking about generalisation that informs the study. This approach to generalisation is referred to by Ercikan and Roth (2006) as a concrete universal approach:

Each observation (case) is understood to constitute a concrete realization of a possibility that exists at the collective level (population). Each observation therefore is simultaneously particular and universal, concrete and abstract, or specific and general.

The study offers a systematic enquiry into specific concrete events. The aim is to provide sufficient fine-grained, detailed description, straddling the different levels of mediation so that the others may be supported in generalisation to the world beyond my classroom and my school.

Case Selection

To enact a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning writing it was necessary to work with my classes, in the three years, as a community of learners. My classroom was where I most often worked and therefore it is the place where interactional moments arose, from which most of the data is drawn. Hence three of the communities of learners, the group that preceded the study and the first two groups during the research period, are cases. I too am a case because of the focus on my learning as a practitioner. Investigating the movement of both the children and myself in terms of changing forms of participation

within the community, as well as how the community itself developed was a necessary part of the study to be able to demonstrate from the data what it was to enact sociocultural practice. Within these overarching cases, I also needed to investigate the case of my sociocultural approach to the teaching and learning of writing. The boundaries of this case were determined by subject settings, as the children engaged with me in writing activities.

To answer the research question about what appears to be formative in children's experience, data was sampled within the cases to uncover how formativity is evidenced in children's talk, and in their writing, as well as in their interactions and their actions and in my own (McDermott, 1996).

Data production

Data was collected during the course of normal classroom work, mostly in the classroom itself. I was guided in what came to my attention in collecting data by the three Wengerian dimensions of mutual engagement, negotiation of a joint enterprise, and development of shared repertoire, styles and discourses. In this way data was produced that exemplifies how I enacted a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning writing. The analysis of interactional moments needed to take into account dialectical connections with other planes of mediation. To achieve this data from beyond the classroom was gathered. For example, to exemplify how AfL is envisaged in NIC, which became statutory in Years 1 and 5 of NI primary schools in September 2007, data was gathered from NI policy documentation; participant observation during training sessions for implementation, both at constitutional/institutional level (courses run by Education and Library Boards), as well as training sessions at arena level, as colleagues from Years 1 and 5 shared what they had learnt at training courses and in their classroom practice.

Methods of data production

The study relies on three main sources of data: observation, informal interviews and documents, both existing documents, documents generated in the course of classroom work, by me, by children, or those jointly-constructed, as well as those generated for research purposes, such as transcriptions of audio recordings, field notes, or reflective writing. The approach to data collection was similar to Lampert's (2001) in that it may be considered at two different levels: what I was doing as part of my teaching practice, and what I did specially to represent that practice in this thesis. In everyday teaching practice, the following records were maintained:

- Lesson plans where plans, observations of students' work and interactions, and reflections on what happened were recorded ;
- Children's writing;
- Photographs taken during classwork, of children at work and of what was on the whiteboard;
- Notes from consultations with parents;

Each of these contains evidence of learning. As part of this research, I also collected:

- Video and audiotapes of specific writing activities across the years which were transcribed;
- Fieldnotes made during or immediately after activities, these included notes during lessons, records of conversations, observations made during AfL training sessions, both in school and at Education and Library Board level;
- Reflective writing as I worked between theory and practice, which I recorded in my research notebook.

A research notebook functioned as a place to record field notes, and for analysis, as I reflected on the day's events, or reflected on reading. Observation was intended to capture moments-in-action. It was unstructured, in that there were no predefined categories.

Observations recorded as photographs and handwritten transcriptions were also included

(see Appendix A for copy of sample page). It was a place to write about the events of the day or something I had read, doing the iterative, dialectical work between theory and practice. Theoretically this may be seen as in the reflective practitioner tradition, as well as dialogic writing (Wells, 1999). I carried this notebook back and forth between school and home, using it to write field notes, e.g., supplementing audio recordings by noting the names of children whose contribution in a class presentation was being recorded, or noting relevant visual information (such as the fact that seven hands were raised when children were invited to offer feedback to someone sharing their story). The material amassed in my research notebooks has thus supported my teaching and research. It is by looking at the ins and outs of my evolving practice that I address the question, what does formative assessment look like in a sociocultural classroom? It was my practice throughout the study to carry on a dialogue with myself (Wells, 1999), keeping this reflective journal, which in effect amounts to a three-year-long interview with myself.

The journaling approach to data production allowed me to record and revisit evidence of significant oral interactions that would otherwise be available only in memory. Interpersonal engagements and arrangements were examined, as well as attention paid to the cultural practices and routines that were being constituted and transformed. This focus allowed insight into the goals and purposes participants were pursuing in the moment. Over time, during each year of the study, this focus on the interpersonal plane, allowed movement more deeply into practice to be traced by focusing on children's ongoing contributions and over time tracking how individuals changed through their participation in activities. I was therefore alert to moments when I noticed children talking, writing, or interacting with me or with others, or in some other way acting in new ways. Video recording took place on just one occasion. This was planned and agreed with two of the children who had developed a way of writing together. I was unable to understand this process by classroom observation in the course of teaching and so I asked them if they

would mind writing with the video camera running. They agreed. The recording provided an opportunity to focus on the interpersonal plane and uncover further examples of formativity. Notes jotted at the time were elaborated more fully later in the day.

Initially the design did not include interviews with colleagues. It was only as my knowledge in practice as a sociocultural teacher developed that I began to understand that how we were together in the classroom was connected to the wider institution. This realisation meant that I began to seek conversational opportunities with colleagues. Conversation with children also offered data to enable understanding of individual viewpoints within the interpersonal plane of analysis. Both sources extended the observational data. This is a form of triangulation, but in a distinctively sociocultural way as a means to understand the dialectic.

Keeping in touch with colleagues was important. My research stance positioned me to see things differently. This is not to argue that the researcher's view is true, but simply that research can offer a form of knowledge from which a reader might seek to understand particular practice from this teacher-researcher's perspective (Schwandt, 1996 in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This is to make a case for the educative authenticity of research; research can give insight into issues such as power, what is afforded, what is constrained, what is legitimised, who is marginalised, and how. Insight into these matters can have immense value, as Fay (1987, p.89) has pointed out it can become a catalyst for change:

People can achieve a much clearer picture of who they are, and of what the real meaning of their social practices is, as a first step in becoming different sorts of people with different sorts of social arrangements

Changes were ongoing in the school and I wanted to understand how these were being understood by my colleagues as well as discussing my own perceptions with them. Lather (1986) writes of the work of research as seeking to uncover pattern and meaning. In a sociocultural view understanding the perspectives of others is crucial. Conversations

helped me as I focused on the community plane by providing me with avenues of enquiry into how my fellow teachers viewed matters of institutional structure, for example, what cultural constraints, resources, values informed their practice. I was also able to discuss their views of the cultural technologies and tools, how did they mark, what way did they use exercise books, etc.

This is an example of the dynamic nature of sociocultural research. In the very act of focusing on the 'contextual of particularity' as Lather (1986, p.69) puts it, in the way socioculturalists talk of particular settings, I found things were not as I had originally thought. My research lens was uncovering phenomena I had not noticed before. Enquiring into such taken-for-granted matters can be problematic when carrying out research as an 'insider'. It can be difficult to ask questions about such matters without appearing strange, but I took advantage of my move from teaching KS2 to KS1 in 2005. I was able to ask questions about KS1 practice in quite a natural way, since my colleagues assumed things must be done differently in KS2. As a way of carrying out informal interviews they suited my purpose well since I am a fellow practitioner and there is therefore an unforced, naturalness 'two [or more] persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest' (Kvale, 1996, p.2 in Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p.75). Sometimes on such occasions it was appropriate to jot down field notes, on other occasions, for example when conversation took place during a coffee break, I noted what was said immediately afterwards.

In the same way, opportunities naturally arising in the classroom were taken to talk with children about research issues; for example, as a method to find out about how individual participants perceived particular activities. This sometimes took the form of informal conversations while reading with a child so that their writing can be a common reference point. It was also possible in conversation with children to reflect on writing development and hear children's views on their own sense of competence and identity. The views of colleagues, for example the literacy coordinator, Julianne White, who worked

with me during the first year of my study, together with those of the various classroom assistants with whom I worked were also sought through informal interview.

I collected samples of writing connected to particular interactional moments as and where they arose. This became a necessary approach, as writing was positioned differently, i.e. as narrative construal rather than school subject, and hence was managed differently as a classroom activity. It became a routine practice with each class to gather together our thinking on the whiteboard (or display board) at various points during activities. This collective thinking or *oeuvres* (Bruner, 1996) became an invaluable element of our way of working together and the data includes photographs, and on occasions, field notes describing the process of writing them. The development of a collective is something noted by Sfard (2006) as both prerequisite and prior to individual transformation. Capturing the thinking of the collective allows the development of locally endorsed narratives (Sfard, 2006), continuously evolving as learners are constantly working to make sense of one another's vision of the world. Photographs were routinely taken throughout the study. These were used in the classroom as an aide-memoire. Photographs of brainstorm or lists of ideas were used later on when the ideas could be further built on or used as resources for further learning. As a data source, such photographs capture moments in time that contain the trace of the new knowledge children were making together

Ethical Issues

The research study was conducted within an ethic of respect for the Person, by proceeding with the voluntary informed consent of participants; by complying with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data as set down by the Data Protection Act (1998); and by acting responsibly in relation to school management, as

sponsors of my research, as the body that facilitated it by allowing and enabling access to data and participants (BERA, 2011). The data collected has been filed and kept under lock and key, and in the case of digital material password protected and is confidential. Assurances have been given to participants that the data is only for use in research. In addition, I have sought to conduct the study within an ethic of respect for knowledge, for democratic values, for quality of educational research, as well as for academic freedom (BERA 2011).

The study developed from my evolving practice as a reflective teacher. My successful completion of an MA and acceptance into the Open University Research School was recognised by the Board of Governors (Appendix C). I informed the principal of the work I proposed to undertake and my doctoral research was included in the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) section of our SDP for each year during my study (Appendix D). This ensured that all members of staff knew of the research. Having the study included in the SDP also enabled me to work with my reviewers under the Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) scheme, to include elements of my research within that scheme. Observations made by them, in my classroom, made a valuable contribution to the research.

I always sought colleagues' consent when audio recording and gave assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. Parental consent was sought in relation to including data involving children in reporting the research (see Appendix E). I approached data collection with the children as participants whose co-operation I sought on the basis of informed consent. I talked with them about why I was recording, on those occasions when I digitally recorded, classroom activities. I did this by referring to how I was interested in what they said, and wanted more time to be able to listen to, and think about what they said, later on. In the study participants' right to privacy is recognised, and they were accorded their rights to confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2011). Participants'

identities are protected by, not naming the school, nor its location, and by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Validity

Guba and Lincoln (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) suggest that fairness is an important consideration in any research study. By this they mean balance in terms of ensuring that all stakeholder views, perspectives, claims, concerns and voices should be apparent in data-analysis. Their concern is that the omission of voices could be considered a form of bias. This is a difficult issue to deal with. If relativist ontology is adopted, for instance, who is in a position to judge fairness? This raises a further crucial underlying question: how is validity achieved in a sociocultural approach? The study's starting point in offering trustworthy evidence is to consider the broader question of how socioculturalism positions the observer to view the world. This is to recognise that the positivist ideal of a neutral or objective view of the world is unattainable since all experience is mediated in some way. Hence, building a trustworthy case begins by making explicit the point of view of the researcher. It is the researcher's theoretical orientation that guides the selection of data and its interpretation as evidence.

Sociocultural theory is relatively new; my research is as much about my learning sociocultural theory, as it is about my learning to become a sociocultural teacher and sociocultural researcher. Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p.309) sense of a particular onus resting on naturalistic researchers as 'the methodological out-group' to prove the utility of their approach may well apply particularly to socioculturalists. This is not to say that a case has to be made for a radical new approach to validity, but that new constructs demand new thinking around validity questions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) were concerned that their proposals on criteria for naturalistic research would be received as prescriptions for new orthodoxy. Their worry stemmed from a belief that the trustworthiness of an enquiry

can only be judged on its own terms. Consequently the onus is on the sociocultural researcher to develop and lay out an interpretive argument describing ‘the network of inferences and assumptions leading from the observed performance to the conclusions and decisions based on the performances’ (Kane, 2006, p.23 in Moss, 2007, p.474).

Triangulation provides an example of how sociocultural constructs alter the way that techniques traditionally espoused by naturalistic researchers can be understood.

Traditionally triangulation is a technique which draws on multiple data sources, typically involving different methods, that support the same conclusion as a way of supporting claims for data trustworthiness. Robson (1993, 2002) notes that a disadvantage of this technique is the possibility that different methods may produce conflicting results which need interpretation. However, such an eventuality is not viewed as a threat to validity in a sociocultural approach since the goal is not sameness and the research will predictably uncover multiple perspectives. For socioculturalists the issue is not multiple sources but multiple lenses.

Sociocultural theory views learning as relational. It can only be developed, enacted, supported, or observed in interaction between learners, other people and cultural tools in their environment (Moss et al., 2008). Valid enquiry into learning and AfL therefore requires the multiple lenses available in a sociocultural approach. Moss (2008) has developed four questions that indicate the kinds of issues that come into view when sociocultural lenses are turned upon learning:

- 1) Who are the subjects of learning, how are they defined and located? (This refers to the individual or subgroup whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis);
- 2) Why do they learn; what makes them make the effort?
- 3) What do they learn, what are the contents and outcomes of learning?
- 4) How do they learn, what are the key actions or processes of learning?

This summary indicates the breadth and depth that needs to come into view in a valid representation of learning from a sociocultural stance. The interpretation of these questions, and their operationalisation within a particular enquiry must be carefully worked out within a sociocultural paradigm.

Data analysis

The thesis seeks to make connections between my experience and what Dyson and Genishi (2005) refer to as ‘the larger professional community’. To return to Eisner’s insight, not only is the intention to add new knowledge which may ‘increase the quality of teachers’ deliberations’, but to generate knowledge which may meet the needs of other educational stake-holders, and contribute to the deliberations of school managers and those responsible for policy creation and implementation.

The data analysis focuses on the dynamic, the ‘moment in action’ (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995), and examines what is captured in the data, from those moments, in terms of planes relevant to their search questions. This is not to say that data have been dissected to apportion elements to specific planes. The analytical process is rather one akin to shifting focus; whatever the particular focus may be, connections with other dimensions of the setting are not severed.

Understanding particular moments-in-action requires exploration of each, as well as of the relationships between them. This enables understanding of how particular interactions enable particular learnings. For example, examining data collected during a classroom writing workshop might focus on the interpersonal plane to consider the interpersonal arrangements between participants as they engage in ongoing activity. The analysis therefore looked for indications of how individuals were working together to structure the situation and enquiring into how the people involved manage both their own role and those of fellow participants. The goals and purposes participants pursue, both

those that are made explicit, and those implicit in their words or actions were also explored. In analysing the data I often worked between notes in the research notebook and photographs taken on the same day to understand how the moves children made found expression in what was written and then photographed, arose from what was available or became available to particular individuals in the moment (Ivinson and Murphy, 2007).

It is along the interpersonal plane that changes inherent in learning may be observed as individuals transform their understanding of and responsibility for particular cultural activities through participation. This is complemented by focusing on the intrapersonal plane to examine individual contributions to ongoing activity, for example by enquiring into the meaning individuals are making in particular situations in order to understand why and how they contribute as they do. The great value of Rogoff's three planes approach is that it allows the relations that contribute to the agentive actions of individuals to be examined. Agency is always mediated, and analysis of mediational means, the tools of the culture, clarifies whether individuals in the moment of action experience empowering or constraint.

Individual engagement or non-engagement is thus viewed as improvised, the product of ongoing processes of reconciliation involving individuals' personal sense of agency as it is extended to them, as well as their active construction of themselves in negotiating the moment, in ways that incorporate the past and the future (Wenger, 1998).

It is by focusing on the personal plane that individual trajectories of learning may be mapped. I have sought to map the trajectory of my becoming a sociocultural teacher. Analysis of moments-in-action collected over the weeks and months of the research reveal what endures over time which is part of the formative process. That which is appropriated from experience contributes to the development of a sense of what the teacher can do to support children as writers. In the same way, as a teacher I gain a sense of what counts as competence, seen in how particular individuals come to develop identities as writers

(Holland et al., 2008). The moments-in-action of my daily experience may also be scrutinised in the community plane, in which case the relationship between institutional structures, such as cultural values or constraints come into view. For example, how AfL at NI policy level is taken up in the school, and how this shaped how AfL techniques developed as arena practices needs to be taken into consideration in understanding my dilemmas at various points during the research. Moss drawing on Jordan and Putz (2004 in Moss, 2008) demonstrates how sociocultural validity depends on multiple types of evidence, taking account of both the evolving nature of learning over time and dialectical relationships among the different planes of mediation. This contrasts with AfL, where assessment is conceptualised as a discrete set of activities so that it is deemed appropriate to focus enquiry around a particular instrument or activity and the circumscribed evidence it provides.

Beginning the analysis

Data collected during the school day were checked whenever possible the same day, or occasionally during the following weekend if earlier checking was impossible. This checking process involved reading notes that had been quickly scribbled to check for legibility and to add annotation to clarify ambiguities. Photographs were filed on the computer, with captions, tags or notes attached linking them to data in the research notebook. Audio and video material was listened to or viewed and labelled. I routinely jotted down notes on anything that occurred to me as I listened to, or watched for this first time. I selected from recordings sections which would exemplify what was formative in settings. These were transcribed, which though time-consuming was invaluable in helping me understand the children's learning during those moments (see Appendix B for sample of how this was done).

In the following chapter, findings are presented as acts in the developmental drama of evolving practice. At issue here is the need to find a way to offer insight that takes account of learning viewed as movement deeper into practice. This entails keeping two dimensions in view. There is a temporal dimension, not only in that the thesis unfolded during a three year period, but also in that learning is viewed as movement along evolving trajectories, with ongoing change inherent, not only in individual learners but in dialectical relationships within and beyond the community of learners themselves. Viewed in this way, my sociocultural lenses could be thought of as prismatic in that they bring into view a spectrum of individual trajectories. Data analysis has involved me in considering the view both along, as well as across these trajectories. To return to the rainbow metaphor, the aim is to frame a segment across the arc, with each of the acts offering insight into particular interactional moments.

Chapter 4 Data analysis and interpretation: The Acts

In this chapter the research findings are presented as a developmental drama in three acts.

Act 1 presents data from the classroom during 2006/2007 to exemplify evolving sociocultural practice and examines the relationship between classroom practice and institutional shaping. Act 2 is concerned with 2007/2008 and how formative work in the classroom appeared in relation to the introduction of AfL in NI policy and in the school arena. This act also includes glimpses into the classroom during times when institutional pressure for alignment was relaxed. Within this analysis is intertwined the story of the children's agency. Data are selected to illuminate how particular interactions and practices enable particular learning to uncover what appears to be formative: that is when new knowledge and new ways of knowing emerge in children's experience of becoming writers.

Formativity comes into view by focusing on Cook and Brown's generative dance. The acts also offer insight into institutional change and how colleagues were relating to me. Act 3 presents reflections on this highlighting the personal in relation to the interpersonal and community dynamics at work during this learning process. Drawing on Moss's (2008, p.229) preliminary question in sociocultural investigation of learning, the analysis presents my experience of agency, how it was enabled, shaped and constrained at different moments, and the relationships involved in its ebb and flow. Each act offers the sense I have made of the practices and interactions and their consequences, drawing on sociocultural tools for understanding learning.

Act One: Scenes from the Year 4 classroom of 2006/2007

In this act, new children arrive with their particular histories of agency and the institutional gaze is shaping my practice. The criticism of my approach to creative writing undermined my perception of my competency and resulted in my acquiescing to institutional pressure.

At the beginning there is a sense in which my agency is constrained, which in turn constrains the children's agency in particular ways. However whilst I changed my approach to learning writing, adopting the institutional approach of isolated sessions, I did not change how I related to the children or how I positioned them as agents in their learning. This meant that the children's agency, as members of a community with the right to negotiate meanings, was sustained with interesting effects – it brought to the fore that agency is relational.

Also this year, AfL was introduced into the school arena within numeracy. Teachers were required to include 'specific learning outcomes' in planning notes and to share these with children, distinguishing between learning outcomes and activities. These learning outcomes would be written into children's exercise books. I continued to build on my exploration of AfL, and my practice was validated by the vice-principal who observed a lesson in March 2007, and credited me with achieving the target we had agreed: to see the children working to 'set learning intentions, including success criteria for report-writing and talk coherently about their own learning'.

In September, the children entered Y4 accustomed to working independently on given tasks completed individually, with clear instructions from the teacher. Learning was viewed as a matter of alignment with the teacher's requirements, as an example from my first encounter with this class, while they were in Y3, illustrates:

[The children and teacher are engaged in reading together a worksheet to be completed individually by the children. The instructions printed on the sheet are read, with the children responding by pointing to their own worksheets.]

TEACHER and CLASS: [Reading together from worksheet] Colour the shape with the smallest area green.

TEACHER: Find the shape with the smallest area. Put your finger on it. Stephen, which of those has the smallest area?

[2 second pause during which Stephen places a finger on one of the shapes on his page]

TEACHER: Good boy – the rectangle. [Teacher surprised and pleased]

(Transcribed from audio recording June 2006)

In the lesson I observed, which was understood to be ‘typical’ of how they worked, the children's role was to complete the worksheet. I had no sense of their contributing to the learning – with the exception of placing fingers and responding with the correct information. Talking had no role in learning. Listening to the teacher and responding to direct questions with ‘right’ answers was all that was required. Every child carried out the same activity and the product would be identical for each.

In a relational view of learning, it is necessary for learners to be part of a community of learners. I was requiring them to develop relationships with each other so that they could build knowledge together and hence see each other as knowledgeable and sources of expertise. Brainstorming is recognised as a valuable tool that offers opportunity for the agency of each person, to be engaged in an active process of producing meaning (Wenger, 1998). The following snapshot from a lesson, involving the creation of a brainstorm, early in December illustrates something of the change I was witnessing.

[The children were sitting in groups. Each group had been given a large sheet of paper and some coloured markers. They had worked together to create a table with four cells on their page.]

SH: Now, each one of those four areas is going to be a place where you're going to think about how wood can be used. Okay? So what you want to be thinking about is: What objects [I stop, noticing one group beginning to talk among themselves.]

SH: [to group] You alright?

ONE GROUP MEMBER: Can you draw?

The children were no longer sitting back while the teacher explained what their contribution to the lesson would be. They were beginning to move away from individualised meaning-making. When I noticed the children begin to talk together, I did

not intervene to stop them, but instead offered them an opportunity to share their ideas with the whole classroom community.

I was offering opportunities for children to work collaboratively, but agency is something that has to be legitimised, others can help or hinder learning. Two weeks later, I recorded a small group, as they created a brainstorm on the topic of Weather. The children quickly began building ideas together:

CLAIRE: Windsock - windsock, how about that?

SANDRA: Windsock, windsock.

JACK: Aye, windsock.

ALAN: Windmill

[Laughs]

DAVID: Winder

ALAN: [Laughs]

DAVID: Winderful

The boys are having fun with word play as they work between the knowledge they have and new ways of putting the sounds of the words together. Interplay of knowledge and knowing can generate new knowledge and new ways of knowing. However the response of the group is not entirely positive, and these new ideas are dismissed by the girls:

CLAIRE: No. Stop messing, David.

ALAN: Winter has to do with wind.

SANDRA: Windsock, windsock - what else?

JACK: Put a circle right through it [referring to the drawing on the page]

ALAN: [shouting] Winter, winter, winter

Alan continues to try to have his idea accepted, and raises his voice so they find it impossible to ignore him. However the group reject his suggestion and Alan becomes involved in a short angry exchange with the other boys in the group, which the girls try to pacify:

JACK: Alan .. David - David [David bumps into Jack]

DAVID: Stephen made me ... he made me trip

ALAN: Yeah, right

DAVID: Right

SANDRA: Please don't argue!

ALAN: [ignoring her] Yeah, right

CLAIRE: Please don't argue!

SH: [Calling across from where I was working with a group at an adjacent table] I don't want to hear you at the next table, thanks.

ALAN: [to the group, referring to the minidisc recorder on the table] You know that's recording, right?

CLAIRE: What else?

JACK: [to David] How about you stay away?

CLAIRE: How about rain?

SANDRA: Yes, rain. Rain has to do with weather.

JACK: And, eh, frost.

This episode offers insight into the complexity that exists within a community of learners. Children develop different identities depending on the forms of participation open to them. The transcript reveals one mention of Stephen but no contribution from him. Stephen remains marginal throughout, involving himself with examining the minidisc recorder, whispering into it, and banging markers against the desk tidy. In this activity both Stephen and the others in the group maintained his lack of engagement. I talked about this aspect of the group's behaviour with the classroom assistant, Vera. She had noticed as she worked with another group how they had excluded two of the children on the Special Needs register from the discussion. Vera thought it would have been quite easy for the two boys, Len and Ivan, to have thought of weather words, but the others in the group made no space for them: 'Harriet was just writing away – even words that Len and Ivan could have come up with.' (Research notebook 1/2/2007)

Later I asked the children about the origin of the different ideas on their brainstorm. Stephen was the only one in the group who was unable to identify any of the words as his idea. Learning, according to Wenger, depends not only on adopting the meanings others are making, but also contributing to the production of meaning. This was something the

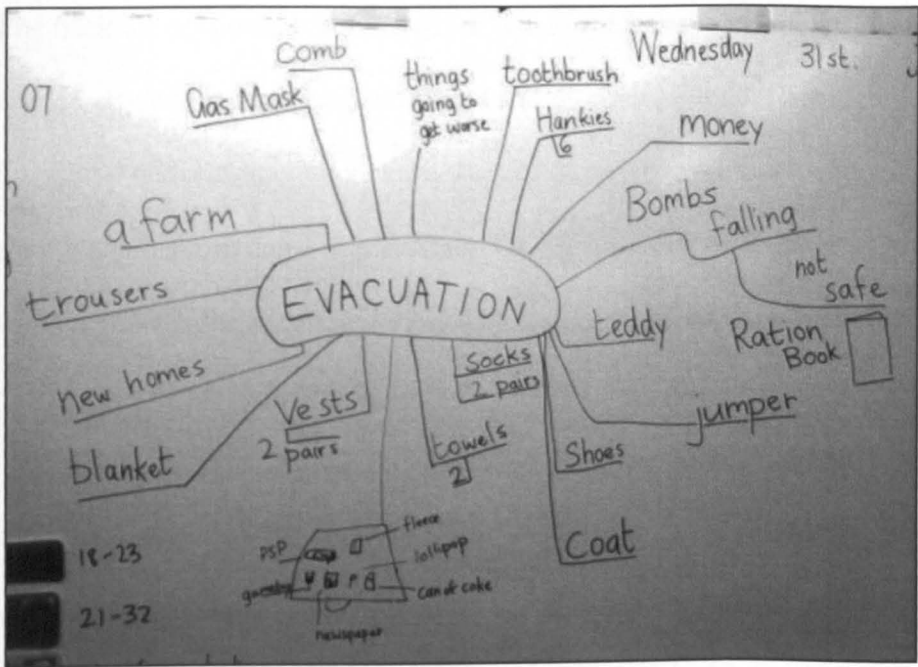


Figure 4.1 Class brainstorm 31/1/2007

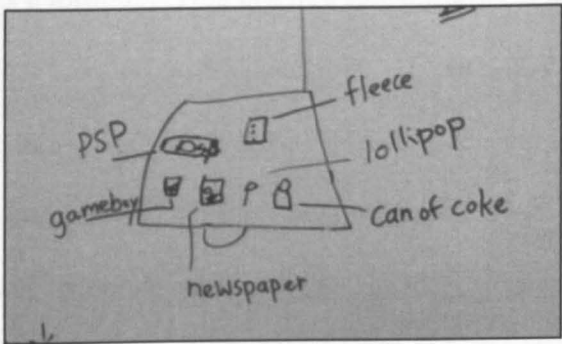


Figure 4.2 Detail, drawn by Stephen from class brainstorm 31/1/2007

children needed to learn to do and I needed to find ways to afford opportunities for this. I was therefore delighted to notice Stephen contributing to a brainstorm created by the whole class working together (see Figure 4.1).

I invited contributions around the room to a class brainstorm with the word, ‘Evacuation’ in the centre. The first person I invited to contribute was Adam. He said nothing. Later, when Sandra contributed, ‘New homes’, I asked Adam, ‘What sort of

homes might the new homes have been?' 'A farm' he responded. Jack then said, 'Things are going to get worse.' I didn't know what he meant. I asked him to explain. He said that this was something he had heard on Spywatch, a serialised story we had been watching on video. I didn't talk with him about what the man might have meant but left it as something to come back to, or something to leave for other children to remember and talk or think about later. By making this contribution, Jack, along with the others were contributing to the generative dance of meaning as we worked at reifying the term, evacuation. Stephen sat silent when his turn came to contribute. 'Can you draw your idea?' I suggested. My assumption was that he was not without knowledge about evacuation but that drawing might come easier for him.

Stephen drew a large rectangle, with six objects inside. I could not tell what the drawings represented. I asked him to explain. It was a suitcase. He was referencing an evacuee's suitcase worksheet from a previous occasion (Figure 4.3). Inside the suitcase, were things he would need if he were evacuated: 'This is a fleece. This is a can of coke. That's a lollipop. This is a newspaper. This is my PSP [PlayStation]. This is my Game Boy.' I labelled each as he spoke. (Figure 4.2) 'Do you think they would have had PlayStation and Game Boys?' I asked, reaching for *Life in 1940s* from the class library, 'Look at the kind of stuff they had then,' I said, giving it to Stephen so he could look for himself. Stephen said nothing. He accepted the book.

Alan mimed Stephen's idea of the lollipop, pretending to be a child who had a lollipop in his hand and was unsure of it, 'They'd say, "What do you do with this thing?"' Everyone laughed at this. I felt pleased with what taking these risks - my risking inviting Stephen to draw a contribution, and his in coming to the board to do it - had opened up. Thinking of McDermott's (1996) idea of how every moment is on the verge of becoming something else, there were moments like that throughout this episode. I could have passed



Figure 4.3 The suitcases on the left of the display were referenced by Stephen when he added his drawing of a suitcase to our evacuation brainstorm.

on and let Stephen remain silent. He could have refused to draw. Someone from the class could have scoffed at his inappropriate objects. I knew that other children knew enough about wartime to know that neither PlayStation nor Game Boy existed then. On a brainstorm it is acceptable to include every idea without filtering. This was why I accepted ideas that later on could be negotiated and rejected by the children. It was important that every person could have their ideas included and that all those ideas would be adopted simply because they were the ideas of a legitimate peripheral participant within our community.

By commenting on Stephen's contribution, Alan was signalling the group's adoption of Stephen's production. Stephen had contributed to an enjoyable episode in the classroom. The new knowledge Stephen created led me to contribute the idea of different cultural tools in the past. This was drawn on by Alan, when he imagined a world where a

lollipop was a novelty and what it might be like to encounter one for the first time. I interpret this as a formative performance that made available a powerful new idea that became part of the generative dance - thus serving as a new learning resource for the collective. Stephen experienced himself as competent as his production was adopted and this not only in reified form on the whiteboard, but in the practice as we discussed and used them imaginatively (Wenger, 1998).

This episode also illustrates something of the value of including various symbolic media alongside each other, something essential in Dyson's (1989) view. Children were weaving together meanings projected through dialogue, pictures, texts from books and from video as they created their evacuation brainstorm - an example of the many ways in which Dyson's multi-symbolic approach enriched the children's writing.

Opening up the joint enterprise – a wake-up call

In February 2007, we surveyed favourite subjects in school, during a numeracy lesson. Harriet, who at that time was one of the most capable writers, commented during the survey, 'I don't like English'. Although the class had been writing on one day, every week since the beginning of September, and on occasion some of the children had even gone beyond the weekly writing session and written similar pieces, there was not much enthusiasm for writing. In the previous year writing had been an enjoyable part of our classroom work, reflecting on Harriet's comment, I wrote:

My central problem with writing as an enterprise in our classroom is that we don't seem to get anywhere with it. When I read the children's stories I am disappointed. We don't share stories together like last year's class – we don't 'feedback' to each other as we did last year. The focus is all about getting completed/presentable pieces of work into the creative writing book.

(Research notebook 13/2/2007)

In response to institutional pressure, I had set aside the approach I had developed to follow the guidance of the literacy co-ordinator. Working with her, I had developed writing lessons that satisfied the institutional requirements. I found it puzzling that the way I was being encouraged to teach was not motivating the children.

I raised the issue with my colleague, Constance Parke, in the parallel class. She was not surprised. She told me that not all children of this age are interested in writing. 'Some are and some aren't'. We try to help them develop, but it's simply a fact that some are writers and some are not. 'Later in life, who knows?' The children's lack of motivation was not something that bothered my colleague. It was also not something my team-teaching colleague appeared to notice. It was only the contrast between what I had known before and what I was noticing now that drew this to my attention.

The principal had read the children's creative writing books that month and met with me to discuss them (Research Notebook 26/2/2007). She had identified progress among those she described as the 'weaker' children. She was especially pleased with Stephen's recent work, noticing the 'Independent Work' sticker that I had affixed (at the literacy co-ordinator's suggestion). She referred to how he seemed 'maybe a bit lost in some earlier pieces'. She was also delighted with the work of the other children. The 'Fire, fire!' stories she described as, 'Lovely!' (these had been written on special proformas and had been on display in the classroom).

SH: What did you think of the thank-you letters [written after a day trip]?

CYNTHIA: They were very good.

SH: I liked them, too. I felt that you could tell how much they'd enjoyed the day - especially Carla, where she wrote about making friends.

CYNTHIA: I really liked Brian's. I liked the way he wrote it.

SH: What did you like about it?

CYNTHIA: I don't know, just something about the way he wrote it.

SH: He writes maturely. He reads a lot and he talks a lot with others.

Supporting mutual engagement is key to creating conditions for the coherence of the class as a community of learners and I was pleased to notice processes of mutual engagement evolving. I was hoping for more, since according to Wenger (1998), mutual engagement is but one of three dimensions within communities of practice. Processes of mutual engagement contribute to the evolving sense of a joint enterprise as the members of the community of practice develop unique ways of living and working together. My sense was that writing was viewed within the practice not as a joint enterprise but as a task set by the teacher. I wanted to open up writing practice to enable the negotiation of a joint enterprise. Writing could then become part of a process, involving children working with me in developing it in a way that represented our collectively negotiated way of doing it. It is through processes of mutual engagement within the joint enterprise that community of practice develops relations of mutual accountability that create circumstances in which they feel concerned or unconcerned about what they are doing. To use Wenger's musical metaphor (Wenger, 1998, p.82), I seemed to have a situation where the teacher was the conductor and set a rhythm that allowed for marching along in step, whereas Wenger's metaphor is of a band without a conductor, where the players create their music by working together, listening to each other, adapting to each other etc.

Working within the constraint of being under the scrutiny of the institutional eye, I tried to open up writing practice for the children. My aim was to allow children to experience what writing, as a symbolic medium among other symbolic media, can do, which would allow us to work together towards a redefinition of what being a writer means. My first attempt to do this was in introducing, *The Birthday Party*, as a writing topic for the children. The intention was to help them make a connection with writing and play, since both are acts of imagination. Hence the children could realise their writing as a means to enter into an imaginative world. I told the children a story, beginning in the real world then moving to the fairy-tale world, to open up for them the possibility of writing a

story that burst out beyond the constraints of a birthday party and offered them the possibility of writing anything they wanted to. Julianne, who was team-teaching with me, followed my lead, joined in and built upon this line of thinking. She referred to the Oxford Reading Tree stories of the Magic Key, many of which the children had read. In these stories the action would typically begin in the normal world of twentieth century childhood, but then the child protagonists would be drawn into some other world, where they would have an adventure before being safely returned in time for tea.

The children were interested in these ideas and participated enthusiastically in a brainstorming session prior to writing. There were very clear indications of movement deeper into practice as I worked with the children that day, as I noted that evening:

This morning I was feeling very despondent at [the] prospect of another writing session. The work I put in, in preparation, set my goal for today as wanting the children to write in [the] context of a birthday party but to introduce an adventure of some sort. So I focused with them on the 'fun' of writing - it's like play - you make up whatever you want to happen etc. Ricoeur has a phrase - 'the kingdom of the as if' which we might adopt as a class slogan (or something similar) - let's pretend, was what I said to them. So I told them a story involving [a] fairy godmother, which was fun to tell because I told it in a very normal, believable context. Then we spent no less than 50 minutes talking as a class - brainstorming ideas - from stories we'd read - ways to go from the party to the adventure, etc. and then at the end drew together ideas on [the] board and asked individuals what they were planning for their adventure. The writing proceeded - with lots of reading together with individuals - sharing exciting stories with each other (Mrs W and me) up to lunchtime [12:15] and until 1.45 [pm - the afternoon session began at 1 pm].

(Research notebook 13/2/2007)

I was referring here to how Julianne and I were both engaged with the children, moving around the room and talking one-to-one with them, and from time to time we would call

across to each other, sharing some interesting idea we noticed in one of the children's stories: 'What do you think of this great idea, Julie has in this part of her story, Mrs W.?' Julie would read a particular part of her story that I had just been discussing with her. Then Mrs W would comment, and one or two of the children might also comment. Then the writing would continue.

The reading technique [that Mrs W and I were using] involves looking for places for capitals/full stops. Asking questions to encourage development of ideas - what did you see? Could you feel anything? etc. and I introduced the idea of taking a new paragraph to a few [children] and we looked at examples in books lifted from [the class] library.

(Research Notebook 13.2.2007)

As they created their stories, the children appeared more engaged in their writing, for example, David not only wrote his story but, at his own request, word-processed it, corrected it with my support, printed it and took it home to mum. If I consider the characteristics of the children's engagement, during this episode alongside Rogoff's (1997) developmental trajectory for writing then I would place them at a very lowly point. The writing event was instigated and driven by the enthusiasm of the teachers, with the children responding by becoming involved, there was no question of them writing with interests of their own, as Rogoff puts it. I was encouraged however, to notice more enthusiasm.

My second initiative, was to begin to work with the children along lines that followed from my reading of Armstrong. For example, I began to explore with the children, his idea of 'inhabiting the work and the world which it represents and projects' (2006, p.179) while we were reading a poem together. Everyone had a copy of the poem Jacky Frost. After reading it together I asked the children: 'What do you notice in the poem that is a new idea for you?' to have the children think about the poem in terms of what the author is saying that challenges our understanding.

SH: What do you notice in the poem that is a new idea for you?

FAITH: She [the author] writes about using a paintbrush.

SH: Why do you notice that - what is it about that that you find interesting, I wonder?

FAITH: I always thought Jack Frost blew the frost out of his mouth.

SH: I know what you mean - I've seen pictures of Jack Frost blowing out cold air, with huge, puffed out cheeks. What does anyone else notice - any other new ideas?

JACK: What does blush mean?

SH: Anyone any ideas?

[Suggestions such as 'face going red' - 'feeling embarrassed' were made by one or two of the children]

JACK: That happened in choir. Paul [Y5] was looking at a girl in his class and he turned red like that.

SH: Anyone else notice anything [in the poem]?

BRENDA: Windowpane - what's that? I've never heard that word before.

(Research Notebook 15/2/2007)

This line of questioning had opened up the opportunity to hear something of the interpretations some of the children were making. It enabled individual knowledge to be shared, and importantly, individuals' sense of what they do not know, which is part of gaining a lived sense of who we are (Wenger, 1998). This, in turn, enabled the shared thinking of the group, which is the process of the generative dance (Cook and Brown, 1999). When Jack makes his comment about Paul, there is a glimpse of the traces of what he is appropriating as an individual from this generative dance. His contribution makes new meaning for himself and for the group as he makes a connection between the idea in the poem, the ideas shared among the children, and the experience he remembers that seems relevant to him. Thus this is again an example of formativity.

I wanted to explore the children's stories with them using this same approach having a particular story as an object of speculation, the first process of the interpretative act of reading. The first stage took place after the children had gone home. I set myself the task of trying to delve deeply into their stories, with the question, 'What is there in this story

that offers something new, or challenges me to think in a new way?' I attempted, following Armstrong, not simply to read the stories, but to inhabit them. For Armstrong, this is the first responsibility of the teacher, that is to put aside that they are the stories of beginning writers, and to find the author's authority as a writer telling his or her experience. As I read and re-read the Birthday Party stories, I was amazed and delighted to discover the truth of what Armstrong was saying. I noted in my research notebook that evening:

This has been a significant day for me ... the best part was that marking the stories - something I find extremely difficult, has this evening been a pleasure and delight ... [The elementary appearance of the work] has up until now been my bugbear - couldn't get over the idea of how poor these stories were - tonight I am excited and even challenged to think in different ways by them.

(Research Notebook 13/2/2007)

Armstrong writes of the way reading includes the drawing out of the work's narrative intention and he urges that the reader redescribe or represent to the author his or her understanding of the work. Institutional practice was to write short positive comments. The marking policy required a positive and constructive response from the teacher that did not constantly pick out the weaknesses. Teachers were to credit children for their ideas, comment on handwriting, and correct common errors of grammar and spelling, but these should not predominate. It was recommended that teachers work alongside children to make corrections, and this was part of how Julianne and I worked with the children during writing lessons. Empowered by a growing sense of what a sociocultural approach was opening up for the children, I changed the style of commenting to a longer comment, extending to a half-page or even a full page, depending on whom I was writing for. The following examples illustrate this change in style. The first of each pair of comments refers to a recount the children had written of the historical character, Mary Jones.

You wrote some good sentences about Mary, Stephen, thanks. (23/1/2007)

Super story, Stephen. I love it because it's all about everyone sharing. I think this is your best story in this book!

(13/2/2007)

(Stephen's Creative Writing book)

Very good story, thanks, Claire. You have told it well - good clear story line with strong ending.

(23/1/2007)

Interesting story, Claire. You managed to write using paragraphs - and you have done it just the way we see it in all the books.

What I like about your story (apart from the excellent use of paragraphs) is:

You are very precise - the date, the age, the decoration on the cake - all these details are important to you so you've put them in your story;

I love the idea of having a cyber man to do whatever you want them/it to do!

Your story has a beautiful ending - it's kind of surprising to read that the person who has travelled in the Tardis, and seen daleks and K9 and cyber men is only just turning seven - a very accomplished young lady! Someone who can go space travelling one minute and enjoy the fun of a sparkler on a cake the next - beautiful!

(13/2/2007)

(Claire's Creative Writing book)

Well done, Jack. You have told this story well. I can begin to have an idea about those long ago times when I read it.

(23/1/2007)

Smashing story, thanks, Jack. What I like about it is:

Great ideas - the secret room, then the desert island, the talking camels and the magic carpet!

It made me shiver with excitement - that idea of feeling the cobwebs touch your faces
gives me the creeps!

You write some of the things people say in the story - it's good to hear how people talk -
tells me how mysterious and wise the camel is when it says, All you do is imagine!

Even though you have a fantastic adventure you manage to get back in time for cake!
Yum!

I think this is a very special story. You worked hard to make it so good. I loved reading
it - all I had to do was imagine.

(13/2/2007)

(Jack's Creative Writing book)

Armstrong argues that it is in the collective enterprise of the classroom, that children's
creativity in all the arts, of which writing is but a part, is nurtured. Part of this collective
enterprise could be made available to children through a third stage of the writing process,
Armstrong's process of documentation.

Importantly I did not include this in my planning notes which were open to scrutiny. I
ran my usual Friday literacy lesson, watching the next episode in our Spywatch story and
completing a short cloze passage based on a summary of the chapter. While most of the
children were engaged in the cloze exercise, a small group helped me reorganise the
bookshelves to free up space, for the children's Birthday Party stories. We opened up each
of the Creative Writing books so the stories were displayed. Not only were the stories
themselves available, but also my written comments alongside the stories. The essence of
documentation is to make achievement visible, as children read the stories, alongside my
comments they would not only be able to think about the work of the author, but also my
response to the work of the author. They would have an indication of the value I placed on
the writing, along with an indication of how I had interpreted the stories, which might offer
them a resource for their own interpretation. Three of the children had not yet finished
their stories, and I asked them to keep on working at them so that they too could be

displayed. I invited the class to choose a book and read a story after they finished work on the Spywatch chapter.

Two girls, Harriet and Mary, were first to choose stories from the display. They chose their own books and began to read them, which surprised me. Later that morning, I asked them about this opportunity to read the stories.

SH: What was it like - having the chance to read the stories this morning?

HARRIET: It's nice to read without having to think about writing it.

MARY: You wrote a long comment on mine.

SH: What did you like about your own story, now that you've read it?

HARRIET: I like the prayer part.

MARY: I wonder if the children kept the toys. Do they still have them? [referring to Harriet's story]

SH: Do you think those children are all grown up and old now?

HARRIET: I liked your penguin [referring to Mary's story]

By introducing the structuring resources of displaying the annotated stories and giving the children time and encouragement to read them, the practice of writing stories had moved away from being a solitary, individualised activity to a companionable, social one. This offered opportunity for the children's completed stories to become the focus of their own attention, as well as that of their peers. In so doing they were able to view themselves as writers, and as others lifted down and read the stories too, they were able to experience and build new relational identities, with their peers. For Harriet, this was an opportunity to see her writing in a new way, as a means of communicating with other children; something that might contribute to her sense of it as a meaningful activity, rather than a teacher-set task.

The practice of children listening and giving each other feedback (peer-assessment) on their stories was introduced before this during the final week in January. Now I was able to build on that beginning. After the children had opportunity to browse the displayed

stories, reading any they chose to, I invited Jack to read his to the class. I reminded the class about how we had talked about the Jacky Frost poem on the previous day - listening out for some new or different idea - like Brenda's 'windowpane' or Faith's 'paintbrush', positioning these girls as experts - something particularly important for Faith because of her rather marginal positioning within the class. My fieldnotes read:

Faith beamed with pleasure as she agreed [with me] and seemed to be enjoying the imagery all over again.

When Jack had read his story, I invited feedback from the class:

SH: Okay, hands up who wants to tell us about something in Jack's story.

[About eight hands were raised, including mine.]

SH: You can pick three people, Jack.

[Jack picked me.]

SH: I loved the part when they wanted to get back home again and didn't know how, and the camel said, 'All you do is imagine!' I think that's a really important thing to think about because that's what story writing is all about, isn't it?

[Jack picked Harriet.]

Harriet: I liked the part about feeling the cobwebs.

SH: What did you like about that part, Harriet?

Harriet: That would feel nice.

[Jack picked Alan.]

Alan: I liked the bit about the wallpaper - what was it like?

Jack: It was just wallpaper - there wasn't a wall - they could smash through it.

This feedback session was short, and lacked the complexity of the kind of intersubjective, generative dances my previous class had been able to choreograph together. It did, however, represent a beginning in opening up intersubjectivity or collaborative thinking among peers. It is out of this collaborative thinking that individuals appropriate knowledge and deepen their sense of the value of the particular narrative vision of their fellow writers, together with a sharper sense of what writing offers them as a symbolic medium. It is

interesting to note that those whom Jack chose to comment, and hence those whose opinions he valued, were those whom I would consider to have been among the expert writers in the class at that time. He knew who to connect to, to source the knowledge about his work and his identity as a writer.

Unlike the more narrowly constructed concept of AfL, formativity is an ongoing process supporting learning as in a sociocultural view learners as members hold each other to account. Rogoff (1990) found that the structure to support children's learning and participation evolves as children gain skills that allow them to assume increasing responsibility. This transfer of responsibility is jointly achieved by adults and children, she talks of 'joint roles of adult and child' changing. Hence the opening up of writing practice during 2006/2007 cannot be attributed to my initiatives alone; as legitimate peripheral participants, the children were discerning a sense of what our joint enterprise was. They were shaping between themselves, and along with me, a growing sense of what was involved in this and what opportunities for participation this might open up for them - something Lave and Wenger (1991) also talk about, using the metaphor of armature. One of the ways in which this dynamic emerged, during that year, was when two of the children approached me to ask if they could write together, during story-writing.

The way the two girls spoke to me about their request indicated that it was a way of writing that they were already doing but that they had thought it was a practice that was not allowed in school. This information did not become available to their previous teacher, as the girls explained when we watched the video of them writing together:

SH: Did you ever write stories together before this year?

LINZI: Yes

CLAIRE: No

CLAIRE: We did at my house sometimes.

SH: But you never did it in school before?

LINZI: We thought we weren't allowed, but with you...

CLAIRE: With Mrs Kirkpatrick we were going to - like she was saying, 'Right this time we're all going to do it all different. We're all going to do it separate - no copying each other's sentences.'

I knew that I could take my lead from the girls as legitimate peripheral practitioners they were in a position to improvise new practice they discerned as supporting their movement deeper into practice. Rogoff points out that decisions determining which activities are available to children for participation are crucial since the actual interactions between children and their peers are nested within the constraints of the available activities and companions (Rogoff, 1990). This is another example of formativity in a sociocultural view. The teacher has responsibility to support children as they progress which includes making arrangements to enable them to take on increasing responsibility for managing situations. This relies on teachers being aware of children's skilful practice and being alert to possibilities for devolving further responsibility to particular children. It is this awareness that formative assessment is meant to develop. From the child's point of view this may be viewed as doing something more interesting and not something they could articulate in 'success criteria'.

In a sociocultural approach the teacher needs to appropriate from the generative dance what a specific task may involve and how specific children are likely to approach it. This is an active process of adjustment to changes in skill and new evidence of readiness provided in the course of social interaction. In the NIC this adjustment is embedded in a procedure known as differentiation. This can be achieved by adjusting teaching or tasks to meet the needs of particular children. If differentiation is by task however there is no opportunity for the teacher to notice developing skill and understanding – for these insights tasks need to be open-ended. Furthermore if children are working on individual tasks deemed to be 'at their level' they miss out on social interaction which would support them dialectically to connect to others know-how and through intersubjectivity accomplish more

and hence move more deeply into practice. But in the institutional view of learning and knowledge as individual acquisition such collaboration is understood as 'copying' i.e. providing opportunities to 'take' others knowledge as the teacher's comments to the girls suggests. This is possible if teaching and learning are understood as a process of transmission and reception.

I had to consider how allowing this new practice might be viewed institutionally. It excited me that something in how we worked together had created the understanding that this would be an approach that would deepen the girls' practice and I wanted to find out, with them, what this new practice would offer. I was intrigued that this initiative from the children was a move towards a more sociable, companionable approach to writing. Institutionally it might be labelled as collaborative writing. This was a term that had been in policy prior to the introduction of the literacy strategy and therefore writing together might be acceptable to the literacy co-ordinator Julianne and agreed to the girls' request. Later, when discussing this new practice with Julianne, she appeared dubious, 'Wouldn't Claire be a much stronger writer?' she queried. Her question suggested that she saw a danger that Linzi would merely copy her friend's work. My response based on the observation data was that, 'Many of the ideas, perhaps most, seemed to originate with Linzi.' 'That's good. I'm pleased to hear Linzi is coming on so well,' she responded, and her doubts seemed to melt away.

Data from this episode, are presented to offer further insight into formativity. The data reveal how both girls, at different times, draw on their personal resources to contribute new ideas within their generative dance. At times they know that they need to do more than talk about their ideas: and so they use their personal dictionaries to support spelling, sometimes dramatising their ideas as they act out what the characters in the story might be doing. At times they work together in a different way, as their learning involves working to keep each other in the dance when disagreements arise that threaten their relationship.

One of the girls referred to the importance to her of this aspect of writing together, during a later interview:

SH: I wanted to find out who does what - is it one [person] has all the ideas ...

LINZI: I have all the ideas - like evil polar bears and ..

SH: But Claire has ideas too - like she had the safe kisses idea. So it's really a team effort, isn't it?

CLAIRE: This is how it works (...) and then we think, right ...

LINZI: And then we put it together.

CLAIRE: We both say the same thing, kind of

LINZI: We just put our own sentence

CLAIRE: And then we put them together

LINZI: You can't give up on each other or there's no point starting.

[Transcription of audio recording 24/5/2007]

As this excerpt indicates, the girls struggled to explain in words their way of working, yet were very sure of the importance of the relational aspect of their work. A sociocultural approach is built on something AfL policy and practice overlooks: relationships between and among learners, including individuals' sense of belonging within the community of learners and how these relationships create possibilities for learning particular things and not others. The two girls engaged in intense relational work. And this is something that would have been out of view in the normal course of classroom writing, as I noted afterwards:

I'm mulling over the episode on Linzi and Claire's video (Clever Mice) where they deliberate the phrase, 'their mum Lisa and their dad Sam' versus 'their mum was called Lisa and their dad was called Sam'. Without the video I'd have had no clue this went on. By the time I arrived to see how they were getting on the dispute was settled and the story beginning read well. I assumed they had spent their time sorting out the cast of

characters - which was true - that had been a major concern for them. But the choice of words for this half-sentence was a focus for intense discussion.

(Research notebook 4/4/2007)

What was striking was the intensity of the work the girls did together at this point in their writing. Each is determined to get it right and they struggle to come to agreement as to what the best wording would be. I had underestimated the power of these young authors and their degree of expertise. They cared deeply for the success of their story and they knew that success depended on the precision of their language. This was a new challenge to my assumptions about children and the kind of writers they could be:

Children's writing, like other aspects of their art or more generally of their thought, is neither carefree nor artless but the product of a conscious intent.

(Armstrong, 2006, p.13)

The following segment is a few minutes into the creation of the story. The girls begin their writing by introducing their cast of characters. As their work progresses they work very hard to manage their relationship. They structure the situation so that, as Linzi described, they never give up on each other. Instead they work to bring and keep a source of disagreement open for discussion despite all the difficulties this creates.

[They write. Then Claire reads from her book to Linzi.]

LINZI: Itchy and Scratchy and a wee thing like this. [Reaches over to write on Claire's page - Claire pushes her hand away. Linzi moves over and writes on her own page to show (comma)]

LINZI: No, no, don't do that and we'll do this. Oh right and then

CLAIRE: mum

LINZI: is

CLAIRE: and their mum Lisa and dad Sam

LINZI: their mum

CLAIRE: Lisa

LINZI: Wait, wait. Let me think. Their mum and dad are called - and their mum and dad are called

[Claire closes eyes - looks frustrated.]

CLAIRE: but then ...[Raising objection.]

LINZI: No it doesn't. We can make up different names for them.

CLAIRE: and their mum Lisa and dad

LINZI: No - and their mum () Oh right Let's rub out that and do Lisa. [Reaches over to Claire's book and points to something to erase.]

VOICE OFF: Very good girls [Boy from class whispering to girls.]

CLAIRE: but she's not a child, she's an adult

LINZI: Oh, right. And their mum and dad is called - are called [self-correcting]

CLAIRE: and their mum Lisa and dad

LINZI: No - and their mum and dad is [Interrupts, looking heavenward, voice stronger and uses hands for emphasis]

CLAIRE: ...[speaks quietly]

LINZI: How do you spell their? Clai-re, Clai-re! [Looking at Claire's book. Claire goes on writing and doesn't look up. Calling her name in diminutive form - spoken close to her face.]

This seems to be a painful experience for Claire. She doesn't want her speech to be picked up by video camera.

[Claire is still trying to negotiate for her wording. Despite apparent use of appeasement gestures, Linzi stays firm.]

LINZI: No [Spoken softly this time. Claire starts to rub out.]

LINZI: You don't have to rub them all out. [Claire keeps rubbing.]

LINZI: Try this rubber, sure. () This rubber is quite good. I just rubbed out that 'd'. Can you see the 'd'? [Reaching for another rubber and trying it out. Claire lifts the rubber Linzi has been recommending and uses it.]

CLAIRE: And their mum comma dad - that doesn't make sense. [Ready to rewrite.

Checking with Linzi what to write. Appealing into her face.]

LINZI: and their mum [trying it out / thinking about it]

CLAIRE: and their mum comma dad - doesn't make sense

LINZI: No - And their mum and dad are called [Spoken softly but with determination.]

CLAIRE: [Questions this again. Linzi shakes head while listening.]

LINZI: How do you know this? [Turning to face her.]

CLAIRE: My mum tells me. [Hand gesture - as if to indicate the quandary for Claire in not being able to easily do what she knows is right.]

LINZI: Please let's just do this then. I know that this equals this. [She writes something on paper (not the exercise book itself) to show Claire. This was not picked up by camera but later Linzi told me she had written a number calculation.]

CLAIRE: Yeah [Verifying that is true.]

LINZI: My mum tells me things too you know.

CLAIRE: mum comma dad - that's what you told me to say so... [Starting to write these words (as if resigned to it but clearly not happy)]

LINZI: I didn't tell you to say it - I said - I didn't tell you to say 'comma'. () OK. Do it your way - do it your way if you really want it your way. (Sigh) You want it your way so I'm doing it your way.

Claire keeps on steadily writing Linzi's words. Linzi looks at what Claire is writing, muttering very quickly to herself as she writes. She sighs - hand under chin - pausing, then continues to write. Claire finishes writing and looks at Linzi who has begun to write it in Claire's wording. Claire rubs out what she has just written and writes it the way she had wanted it all along. Linzi looks at Claire's page to check what to write.

CLAIRE: One day Sam went to work and then Lisa went shopping.

LINZI: Yeah.

CLAIRE: and then they go somewhere when they're out

LINZI: It was a day off - the day teachers work and children have a day off.

CLAIRE: Teachers training day

LINZI: Yes, teachers training day

CLAIRE [starts to write]

LINZI: Sam went to work. Lizzy

CLAIRE: Lisa! [Correcting]

LINZI: Lisa went shopping and it was a training day for Sam, Itchy and Roger.

Rogoff (1990) discusses the importance of shared problem solving, demonstrating that this is what underlies the benefits of peer interaction. She draws on the research of Miller (1987, p.231 in Rogoff, 1990, p.178) who found that when partners engage in discourse aimed at resolving contradiction, their dialogue 'has a built-in capacity to release processes of collective learning'. As partners work together, insisting on their own perspectives, they clarify the problem to themselves and to each other in their co-construction of the argument. Even if they can come to no solution, they know that they need a solution beyond their present reach and are in a position to reach for it which is another expression of formativity. As the two girls work together they draw on all their interpersonal skills to argue their own case. Claire, who is sure of her ground – she has individual tacit knowledge - of the better wording of the phrase in question, concedes for the sake of maintaining good relations with her friend and writes down the alternative wording. Just when it appears that the argument is over and the girls have made the poorer choice, Linzi changes her opinion and adopts Claire's suggestion. The resolution arrived at results in both girls writing down the better wording which indicates that Linzi moved deeper into practice as a result of the argumentation process. Hence an example of formativity. A few days later, as we watched the video together, I asked the girls about this difficult few minutes:

SH: You seem to be having a disagreement?

LINZI: That does happen sometimes, but we figure it out.

Lave (1988, p.176) draws attention to how in practice ‘the complex constitution of structuring resources [is] inventively employed in gap-closing, sense-making processes’. The girls reach points in their writing where they need to develop the ongoing story. The contingencies the girls have already created act as structuring resources for them, for example, they have deemed their mice characters to be children, therefore they need to imagine circumstances where the mice can be home alone. Hence the mum goes shopping, whilst the father is given the role of teacher, since this affords the possibility of being in school without the children, on a teacher-training day. Once they have decided on these contingencies, the girls continue to write their story until they become aware of a further dilemma.

The depth and richness in the girls’ work, is not supported in the First Steps literacy strategy approach to teaching narrative which treats the pupil as a newcomer to writing. The first step is therefore familiarisation, with the teacher drawing the learner’s attention to how narrative is structured: stories have problems and beginnings, middles and endings. Linzi and Claire know these things and do not need to be told them or discover them in the writing of others. They, like all of us, inhabit a sea of stories, as Bruner (1996) has pointed out. At issue is where teachers position children and how much engagement with writing they are afforded.

These segments of the girls writing together show how, as Lave puts it, understanding belongs directly to the experienced world, in activity. The girls, as they work together, embody relations of mutual accountability to the enterprise. They know what matters and what does not matter, what they need to talk about and what they can leave unsaid. There are times, for example, when a suggestion is made by one of the girls and they both write it down, without any discussion. They demonstrate a sense of when their work is good enough and when it is in need of improvement, relying on what Cook and Brown (1999, p.386) label ‘group tacit knowledge’. This is knowledge they hold in common about how

narrative works. At various points during the episode, both of the girls adopt a role as someone holding the other to account. On occasion one will appear to produce an idea and bid for its adoption, as for example, when the following interchange takes place, Linzi is bidding, but her ideas are not adopted, even by herself, until Claire expresses willingness to adopt them.

[The girls have just reached agreement as to what to write for the next part of the story and are engaged in writing in their individual books.]

CLAIRE: [spoken as she is writing these words] Lisa ... before she went shopping she said, 'Don't go outside!'

LINZI: [watching what Claire is writing] How do you spell shopping?

CLAIRE: [pauses to spell the word and then continues to speak the words as she write them into her book] s-h-o-p-p before she went

LINZI: [notices a crease in her book where she has doubled it back on itself] Oh look at my book. I didn't bend it right. [She tries to straighten it and then continues to write.] Who can they call the cat? How do you spell? () The cat called SpongeBob. [They both laugh.]. Oh do SpongeBob please. [The girls notice someone interfering with the camera and Claire goes to tell the teacher.]

LINZI: Make up the name of it. Come on, please. Evil () Ziganol (?) What about () Mrs Herron?

CLAIRE: Yes. [They start writing again.]

The roles are reversed later during the episode when it is Claire who is producing ideas and Linzi who is hesitant to adopt:

CLAIRE: ..the next day was Saturday. So .. they would dig a hole.

LINZI: No.

CLAIRE: and then they'd fall down

LINZI: No, because their mummy would be [there] on Saturday.

CLAIRE: Yes, but their mum might go shopping again.

LINZI: No (..) you can't have everyone shopping too much (.) What about the dad?

CLAIRE: My dad works on Saturday.

LINZI: I know, but he's [the dad in their story] not a plumber.

CLAIRE: My dad is a plumber.

LINZI: I know but he's not a plumber - Sam - he is a teacher.

CLAIRE: No. Alright. Go for a holiday?

LINZI: No then they [the mice] would have to go for a holiday.

CLAIRE: Unless they leave them?

LINZI: No that would be sad. It'd be like the wartime - parents are leaving home without their children.

CLAIRE: Oh aye. It's the wrong way round. Children have to look after their mums and dads.

LINZI: (recapping what they have decided already) They were going to kill them but () but they were going to trick them and kill them and eat them for supper.

CLAIRE: (Returning to the dilemma) But what did they [the mice] do?

LINZI: (gathering what they have decided about the story so far) The mice knew that the women, they were Mrs Herron and Vera [our classroom assistant], were acting like cats. (She looks at what she has written and points to the word, Itchy.) So Itchy, that's a good name (she laughs), so Itchy

CLAIRE: . . .[suggesting the other mouse's name?]

LINZI: (rejecting Claire's bid and continuing to produce an idea for how the story might continue) No, he was the smart one, went inside and called them. No, OK, just write the first part.

CLAIRE: (agreeing) OK. Just write the first part.

They both return to writing down the next sentence which they had earlier agreed. They toy with the idea of continuing the action of the story into a second day, Saturday. They consider the possibilities: further shopping for mum, and whether dad could be at work on Saturday. For Claire both of these are plausible, but Linzi objects convincingly, reminding Claire that the dad in the story is not Claire's own dad, for whom Saturday work is routine,

but that they have made him a teacher, and therefore going to school is not an option. Claire accepts Linzi's argument and offers the idea that they could go on a holiday. This is also dismissed by Linzi on the grounds that the children would have to go too, and the story could not continue. If the children were left behind while the parents went on holiday, she reasoned, that would change the mood of the story. Referencing learning about evacuation during World War II, Linzi commented: 'that would be sad. It'd be like the wartime - parents are leaving home without their children'. They have not yet solved their dilemma and soon return to it. However the issue of finding a way to have mice/children home alone on Saturday is no longer part of their dilemma. Instead they configure the dilemma as a 'trick'. And so they begin to explore what sort of trick they need to include.

Epilogue

Relationships had developed so that the children were recognising each other as knowledgeable and sources of expertise. A sense of belonging was evident for example Stephen who had entered as a person on the margins had become more centrally involved. I noticed him bringing his parents and grandmother into the classroom, on the evening of our Christmas show. 'This is my group.' he announced to them with pride, as he pointed to his group name on the Stars Board. And his grandmother had recognised a change in him, 'He's really come on well since he joined your class. I help him with his homework and I can see a big difference.' (Research notebook 15/12/2006)

Extending agency had resulted in greater enjoyment for the children as their writing made sense to them as something purposeful and authentic. The children were writing with enthusiasm and were going beyond what I was asking them to do so individuals were moving on different trajectories: Hamish's mother told me he was writing stories about Dr Who at home, collaborative writing had developed as several other pairings of children

emerged. Brian had, on his own initiative, written his *Clever Mice* story as a comic strip and commented to me in May on his own sense of competency as a writer, something he recognised in the relative ease with which he could create long stories: 'I used to take the whole story time to just write about seven lines in Primary 3.' Claire and Jack were recognised by all as expert writers.

Harriet who had said she did not like English continued to be regarded as an expert writer, but seemed to be enjoying writing more. In the beginning Harriet was writing only in response to requests and had a sense of competency as a writer derived from the response she received from the teacher, e.g. reflecting on the first of her stories that year, Harriet commented: 'Mrs Black liked it and gave me a head teachers award and I liked it.' But as our community of learners had evolved writing became an important means for social connection. Using Rogoff's (1997, p.282) questions mapping possible trajectories for writers moving deeper into practice, Harriet can be understood as someone who was initiating communication through writing. She was finding writing useful in the course of her day to day life in the classroom, and she was considering the understanding that the others would make of her written communication.

During this year I established the value of sociocultural theoretical tools to help make sense of classroom life, and to frame problems and find solutions. The Cook and Brown (1999) model of knowledge and knowing brought into view knowledge as well as relationships of knowing that I would otherwise have overlooked. For example, whereas my colleague, Julianne, viewed Claire as having greater knowledge than Linzi, I was able to uncover relations of interdependency. And both girls appeared even more knowledgeable than I had previously thought: validating my positioning of children as legitimate peripheral participants, cultural participants (Armstrong, 2006) who bring knowledge, experience and culture with them (Moss, 2008). My focus was on how I was working with the children closely observing as they and I worked between doing activities

and talking about them – working between participation and reification (Wenger, 1998), in an evolving process as knowledge and knowing were mutually enabling (Cook and Brown, 1999). This was where formativity was ongoing and where I could offer guidance.

I had no sense of the quality of my work with children being challenged as this act unfolded, although the numeracy co-ordinator commented on the lack of evidence of children self-assessing in their exercise books. In the beginning I had been positioned as needing help and support to teach creative writing. By the end of the act, I appeared to be repositioned. As the end of term drew near, the principal approached me to inform me that she was assigning me to teach Y4 again in the following year. She told me that there would be no parallel Y4 class, which meant that I would have no colleague to work alongside me, and she added that she hoped I would regard this as a vote of confidence from her.

Act Two: Scenes from the Y4 classroom of 2007/2008

In this act I am working with another group of children. I am experiencing myself as competent in the practice, knowing what I am doing and why I am doing it. Hence the children are empowered to develop in all sorts of ways and so too am I. During this act, conflict arises as the inclusion of AfL into school policy is widened beyond numeracy. The principal supports the institutional practices established by the implementation committee for its inclusion and works to ensure that inspection criteria and expectations of what constitutes 'good' practice determined by structures beyond the school are met. This closes down the potential for negotiation locally. So the act hinges on messages of agency and shaping.

Because I understood writing as fundamentally about narrative construal, I decided to return to practice where children engage with writing every day – and that that writing would be entirely their work in their book. My intention was to legitimise their meaning-making. I provided books with both blank and lined pages in recognition that drawing can be meaning-making in exactly the same way as writing, and accessible before children have gained fluency as writers. The children were informed that they would have opportunity every day to write in their books and they could share their work with the class – every afternoon I would read from a published story and offer an opportunity for anyone who had something to share to do so.

On the first day of the autumn term, we brainstormed ideas of the kinds of things we could put in our books (see Figure 4.4). I told the children to leave the first page blank as that could become a list of contents later on. I also encouraged them to make a list at the back of the book of story titles – about ten of them, so they always had something to write about – they could choose which title to write about when they finished the story they were working on. I explained I wanted them to use 'have-a-go' spelling. Every morning the

first item on our visual timetable was Writing. This gave children around fifteen minutes to work in their books.

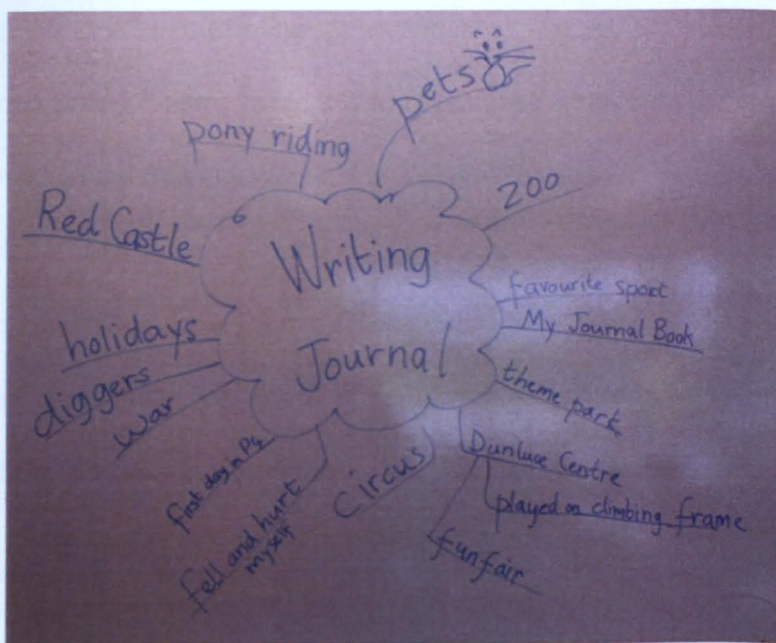


Figure 4.4 Class oeuvre, brainstorming ideas for Writing Journal stories September 2007.

By the end of the year the children had two or in some cases three books of stories; a few children drew in preference to writing, some introducing words in speech bubbles, cartoon style; two boys routinely constructed pictures or models (e.g. hats) from paper/craft materials. As the year went on other activities became part of Writing Journal time (puppet show rehearsal, juggling, Rock Band – when Henry said he had written a song in his Writing Journal rehearsals developed for the performance, and he then gave guitar tutorials during free play time on Friday afternoons). Most stories were personal recounts, about visits to their grannies, the dentists, etc. Some wrote imaginative stories. One girl wrote a little series of biographies of each member of her family. Many of the children wrote poetry, e.g. after I introduced the acrostic form they wrote poem after poem about all their friends. They also experimented with ideas given them by a published poet, Nick Toczec who visited our school during Poetry Week. Many of the children copied poems or sections of stories from published books.

Sometimes numbers appeared, for example a couple of boys got fascinated with the idea of multiplication and wrote columns of figures multiplying numbers in sequence. Ideas that could be traced to curricular topics appeared, e.g. in 'My School' (a writing task I set in the summer term), Calum wrote: 'We are learning about the second world war. And I wrote a story about the Second World War in my writing journal.' Children became very absorbed in their stories and would pull out their books (or take their books home) whenever they had a spare moment (Figure 4.5) captures Carol as she snatches a moment to consult her friend, Beth, about a dilemma in her current story, as the children change after PE. I overhear Anthony comment as he reads, 'That always happens to me!'



Figure 4.5 Carol catching a moment to write

They shared their stories (performances, models, etc.) with each other. Every afternoon we had children reading their work to the class and when they read, the other children would make comments or ask questions, for example, they might say, 'I liked your story', or 'Did you do a picture?' (and the person would then show their picture, or they might ask a question, 'What's an x-ray?' (which was answered by another child in the class – 'It's a thing that shows your bones.' And the next child invited to respond told a story of the time she hurt her wrist and had an x-ray); writing a story entitled: My Year in Primary Four – so far (teacher set) Beth wrote:

My first day in p4.

My first day in p4. was quite scary to be in a new class. Are Room number is nine we didn't learn about famous people then. We got a Writing Journal to write about stuff that happened are you could copy books in to your writing Journal and you can read it to the class.

As the children completed a story I would add their name and story title to a list and each day three of the children would share their stories. One day in May, Carol told me that she had a story to share. Her story was entitled, 'My bank holiday weekend'. In the story Carol told us about a life-threatening accident involving her granda. From the opening line we knew as we listened that we were sharing something very precious for Carol:

It was on Thursday afternoon when I noticed that mummy wasn't there to lift me. It was Granny and Granda. I asked Granny, Where is mummy? And she said that my other Granda had crashed the lorry into a field. He had to be cut out and rushed to _____ Hospital.

(My bank holiday weekend by Carol, opening lines)

In her story, Carol wrote about her own thoughts and feelings as she tried to make sense of this accident. In the middle of a ghastly accident that had been traumatic for her whole family circle, she had found words to make her own sense of it. She wrote:

When I got home I was very worried. My aunties and my dad was very worried to. They went to the hospital. But my granda is very very lucky. He stayed alive. He was m[illimetres] from dying. God looked after my granda.

This writing was empowering for her, positioning her as the person who narrates to herself and others the meaning of her life. The children's comments during the feedback session focused on talking with Carol about her granda, e.g. did he stay alive? Is he out of hospital? My granda was in hospital. As more expert in the practice, I knew the value her writing would have beyond the classroom and after she had read it, and children had

commented to her on it, I asked her if she had shared it with any of her family. She said that she would like to so I encouraged her to take her book home and read it to her aunt (who was a teacher in the next-door classroom). Later I talked with her aunt who told me that the story had been shared throughout the family.

Narrative construal, of which this is an example, is part of becoming. For Carol with a growing sense of her place in the family, and how the values of the family are becoming her values, and as a writer whose story is valued within the community of learners and has value beyond it. If children's writing is reduced to a technical task its value is trivialised (Hall, 2004, p.84). Through affording extensive opportunities to write the children valued writing as a way to negotiate the meaning of their lives just as adults do.

The work of the classroom in relation to AfL as an arena practice

During the first weeks of autumn 2007 I introduced a new structuring resource - a visual timetable. This was recommended in the NIC literature on activity-based learning, a priority in our School Development Plan that year. The visual timetable listed the various activities planned for the day, alongside annotated pictures to represent them (see Figure 4.6) under the heading, 'We are learning today'. It allowed the activities for the day to be connected to previous learning (because the pictures reappear) and to learning intentions and reifications of the activities we were engaging in. It got around the difficulty AfL poses for socioculturalists in that a distinction is proposed between learning and activity. I used it routinely with the children, as the day progressed, to create representations of our collective knowledge. It is a mark of the value of this as a structuring resource that the children gradually took over responsibility for this writing as the year progressed (see Figure 4.6).

My practice was to spend time each morning running down the day as represented on the visual timetable. During a lesson I often used the visual timetable as the starting point.

Often I would attach a laminated learning intentions poster (see figure 4.7) to the board, running off at the side, so that it made a connection with what was on the timetable. The

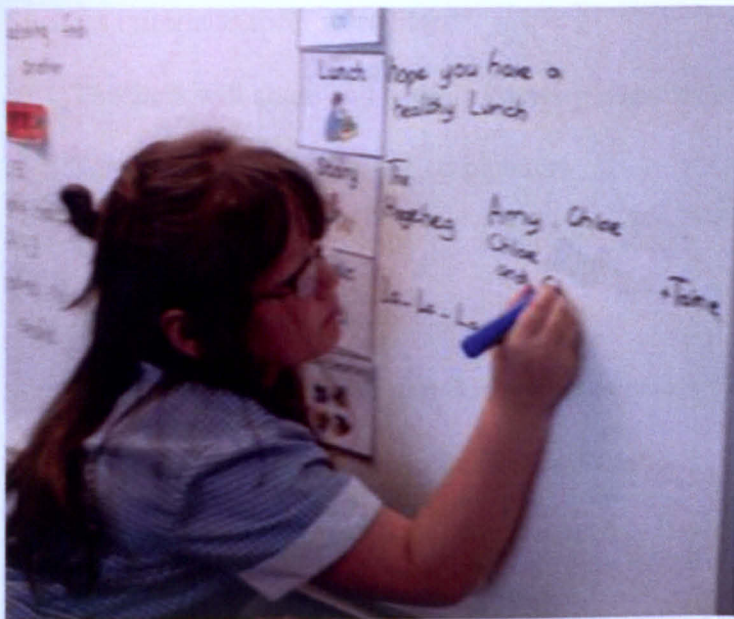


Figure 4.6 Tracy in role of Class Monitor writes names of children who have volunteered to read their stories on the visual timetable for the day (16/6/2008)

learning intentions poster could then be moved off the board to display alongside the children's written products, or stored until we returned to the topic.

During this period AfL, having been introduced in the previous year, became a focus within the School Development Plan. Teachers were positioned as newcomers and were expected to transform their practice until it fitted within the regime (Wenger, 1998). The AfL Action Plan 2007/2008 proposed focused implementation work initially on learning intentions. Our current practice was described:

Learning intentions are included on planners;

Focus on learning intentions in Numeracy 2006/2007;

Learning intentions are not shared with class formally;

Learning intentions are not displayed formally.

Targets for changes to practice were set:

To share and explain learning intentions

To write effective learning intentions using child-friendly language

To revisit learning intentions throughout lesson;

To display learning intentions

Success criteria to meet were listed:

Teachers will share and explain learning intentions in Numeracy weekly

Teachers will have completed planners

Children are aware of learning intentions

Learning intentions are clearly displayed.

Sources of evidence to use in monitoring and evaluating the implementation included:

Evidence in planning and through observations

Discussion with pupils

Evidence of learning intention boards.

Many colleagues seemed content to carry out the procedures, taking on trust what they were told about AfL. Other colleagues were positioned as experts in relation to AfL and became members of the implementation committee with responsibility for offering in-house training on the NIC, including AfL. These included the Y1 and Y5 teachers taking part in the introductory training offered by the Education and Library Board and a member of staff studying AfL as part of work for the masters degree MTeach. It was stated that the make-up of the committee would be flexible, that it would be reviewed the following year. The staff were assured: 'Everything will be done through consultation.' (Personal notes Staff Meeting 31/5/2007).

In his study of claims processors, Wenger (1998), noted how their training in how to complete a particular data form enabled them to find an entry point to the job. In that case, as in the case of the majority of staff in the school, non-participation was an initial relation that allowed involvement. This was similar to my own initial involvement in AfL. However Wenger noted that as time passed the claims processors did not grow in confidence in their relationship with customers as they used the data form. Their lack of

access to the technical meanings of the procedures prevented them from deepening their knowledge so that their non-participation became a relation of marginality. That day as I listened to the arrangements that were being made for the introduction of AfL into our school, I felt that I was outside the process. I viewed myself as knowledgeable but my knowledge was not legitimised.

One afternoon (25/10/2007), the principal came to the classroom to enquire about how I was sharing objectives with the class. She had noticed that I did not have a recognisable WALT board. I showed her how the learning intention statements on the posters displayed around the room related to current displays (see figure 4.7), and how those not on display were ready to be used again when the class returned to that topic.



Figure 4.7 The small poster at the top of the door is positioned below the clock and reads: We are learning to tell the time.

Alongside the more recent of our learning intentions I had also noted some success criteria. The use of laminated card meant that changes could be made as learning progressed and the template for the cards was from Clarke (2001) a recognised expert in the NIC (see chapter 2, p.53).

The principal commented that what I was doing was going beyond the sharing of learning intentions. She said that her problem from a management point of view was that having a WALT board was required as evidence that this was being done.

The principal noticed the visual timetable with one of the learning intention posters attached. It connected to our literacy work on badgers. I had not put it up during the lesson; during lunch one of the children had found a blank learning intention poster and brought it to me with the suggestion, 'We could write: We are learning to write information about Badgers into our Creative Writing books.' So I wrote the 'Write information' into the part of the poster that completes the 'We are Learning To' statement and put the 'about Badgers into our Creative Writing books' into the 'We know we've achieved this because' part of the poster. I explained the display to the principal, and that it was one of the children who had contributed the learning intentions and success criteria statements to make clear that the children were just as much 'in touch with their learning', which was a phrase she used, as those in the classes of the teachers with WALT boards.

Her response was to exclaim, 'But this is a WALT board!' I pointed out that this was not quite the same as it referred to what we are 'learning about' rather than what we are 'learning to' but she thought it was a 'living WALT board' because of its interactive nature and could be a way for colleagues to develop their WALT boards. She told me that if I kept photographs as evidence of what I was doing then she would be satisfied that I had met the objective.

I was delighted with the principal's positive response and that I was recognised as knowledgeable. In an email to my doctoral supervisor that evening, I wrote about what this legitimisation meant to me and how I was trying to connect community of practice theory to my experience as a member of the teaching staff:

My conversation with her [the principal] was about more than just 'WALT-boarding'. I was trying to say to her, 'look I have something to offer you here, use me on this one'. I

have previously offered, but I think I was trying to up the stakes by trying to demonstrate to her that I do in fact have some working knowledge of this issue that you are interested in. Trying to let her see too that what I am offering is slightly different from what she is currently experiencing and maybe, maybe she will want further conversations. Who knows? It is very odd to feel marginalised in an institution that is changing under new management. [I am] trying to find a way for myself to become more centrally involved in the community of practice, I guess. And also taking the opportunity to talk about educational issues with her, rather than just management ones.

(Email to supervisor 25/10/2007)

However on the following morning the principal again visited my classroom. She explained that she wanted to apologise for ‘making a mistake’ regarding the WALT board. She told me that the Senior Management Team had explained to her that a visual timetable would not be the same as a WALT board and therefore she had come to ask me to create one.

A few days later I added the turtle picture to the whiteboard as shown in Figure 4.8. The call-out beside the turtle (just beyond the picture) reads ‘We are Learning Today’, which satisfied the requirement for a board incorporating the acronym WALT, even though the word ‘to’ is the more usual association with the letter ‘T’. A section has been deleted from the photograph since it included the name and address of the school.

The children found the turtle picture very attractive and wondered if the turtle would be able to help them to do their work. I suggested that that was unlikely, although I had heard stories about toys that come alive when no-one is about; so I did not rule it out altogether. On the other hand, I suggested that the turtle might help us think about our learning. I felt that it might be possible to develop this addition to our advantage by regarding it as a new structuring resource (Lave, 1988), that would, in time, become a resource within our shared repertoire.

I taught the children Sweep away or The turtle will talk it seems, which is a North American folk-song about dreams:

Sweep, sweep, sweep away,
Sweep the road of dreams.
People say that in the night,
The turtle will talk it seems,
The turtle will talk it seems.

(Traditional American)

(McNally, 2006, p.56)

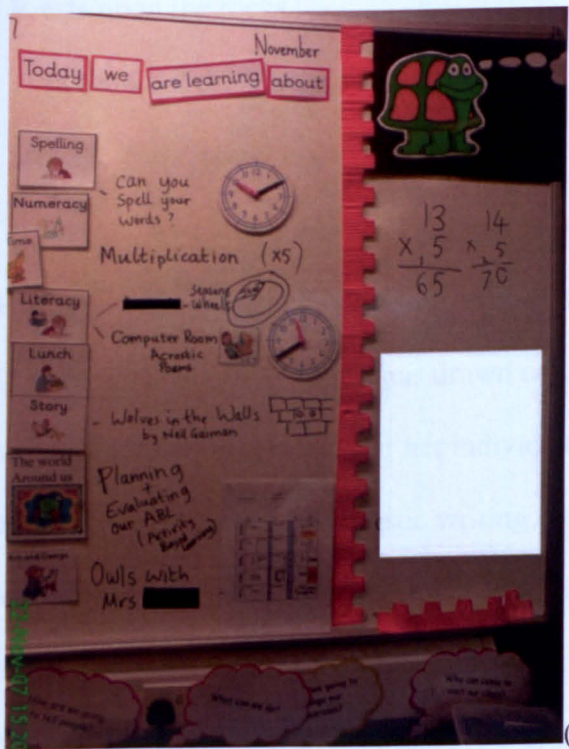


Figure 4.8 Visual timetable - with the turtle

This supported the constitution of the turtle. It suited my purpose since the turtle is taken in some cultures to represent planet earth, and is traditionally thought of as being very aware of all the things around it. Incorporated within our class’s interpretation of the song was an opportunity for improvisation, as the turtle engaged in secret conversation.

A few days later there was evidence that the children were beginning to negotiate meanings around the turtle. One of the children had done some work at home thinking about this and wrote a letter and a poem about how it could be useful:

Dear Mrs Herron,

We could make the turtle as our mascot in the classroom. It would be so COOL! I wish I could see a turtle in real life! It would be swimming with its Babies. Here is an acrostic for our class mascot, the Turtle. Turtle by Linda Brown:

T he Turtle is our class mascot.

U can see it as well.

R ests upon the rocks.

T he sound of the Turtle is lovely.

L oveable and sweet is the Turtle.

E veryone loves the Turtle, but not everyone.

Linda explained to me that the last line refers to the fact that some people kill turtles. Her writing reveals formativity as she has drawn on collective communication as the turtle theme was explored as a source for her individual thinking (Sfard, 2006). Even the form of the poem can be traced to the acrostic writing introduced to the class the previous week. After Christmas, I changed how the turtle was placed on the whiteboard. Instead of the remote position at the top of the board, with the constant call-out, stating: 'We are learning today', the turtle was situated informally alongside the visual timetable (see Figure 4.9).

This then developed so that the turtle became involved in the classroom talk by asking key questions often suggested by the children, and drawn from the visual timetable. This proved very useful for focusing class discussion and enabling the reification process. In Figure 4.9, the class discussion is summarised in the bullet points. The turtle acts as the collective voice in the development of a knowledge asset for the community. This is a form of knowledge overlooked in constructivist or social constructivist versions of formative assessment, but which comes into view in Cook and Brown's (1999) model of

knowledge and knowing, as explicit group knowledge. It afforded opportunities for guiding learning (Rogoff 1990) and recognises the children's expertise. In the discussion around the turtle questions, the generative dance of knowledge creation takes place. The ideas noted on the board, or that children appropriate and later use, indicate something of formativity that is ongoing as the group builds knowledge together.

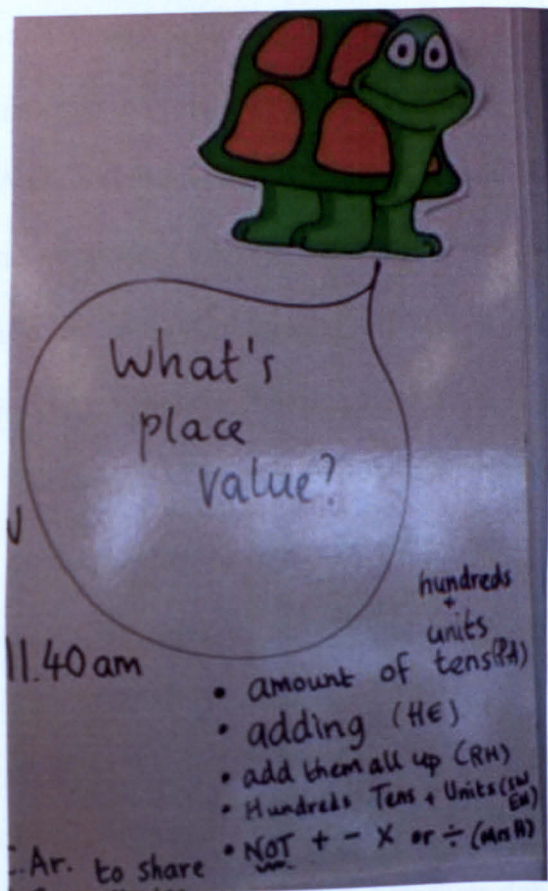


Figure 4.9 The turtle finds a voice

The primary value of these jointly-constructed knowledge statements lies in their contribution to the development of understanding of the joint enterprise. They function as a way of engaging with the impact of the subjectivity of participants as everyone is encouraged to contribute to clarifying collective explicit knowledge. This is not to say that the joint enterprise is entirely delimited in the oeuvres of the collective. As Cook and Brown (1999) have shown, such group explicit knowledge does unique epistemic work, but not the whole of it. The backwards and forwards work between participation and

reification is also necessary as children engage in activity and discuss what they are doing. Hence individual as well as group tacit knowledge develops alongside the explicit. This is the mechanism that enables the teacher to support children's engagement since a sense of appropriate tasks emerges for the teacher out of the generative dance that is emergent. The teacher is working alongside the children to ensure tasks make sense to them. This is essential since children only master school practice insofar as they are motivated to enter into and identify with that practice, and believe that they will be able to function within it and use it in the here and now of their lives (Hall, 2004). Connection may be made here to the ARG definition of AfL in that the words of the definition could be used to refer to the formative work of the sociocultural teacher. However, the meaning that I make from each of the terms of the definition is different, as well as where I look for 'evidence' – as Moss (2008, p.233) argues in relation to her third question:

'What do they learn?' is not just a question of knowledge (content and skills or changing mental representations) but of the relationship between learners and knowledge, which entails questions of identity and agency as they participate in practice where the knowledge has meaning.

AfL proposes the starting point, not as the learner's experience in practice, but the abstract reification formulated by the teacher. This creates a problem for some children as the task of abstracting is very difficult and teachers don't teach this, they assume the abstraction is what is learned, which is the case for those children who see the goals of the task and strip away and pay no attention to the task. But many fail so for them what they are engaged in is not valuable learning just compliance with tasks set for them, e.g. writing that is technical rather than authentic (Hall, 2004).

In March the implementation committee introduced another of AfL's strategies - sharing success criteria. When Beryl and Janice introduced success criteria they presented them as something difficult to create, demanding hard work in order to formulate statements that children would be able to understand. They explained that although the

NIC view of success criteria was that the statements should be negotiated with children they were not asking staff to do that at this stage. To begin with teachers would model success criteria and discuss them with children. Discussion was necessary to ensure children understood what the teacher had in mind. Hence success criteria were presented as a procedure, or set of steps the teacher creates for the children to enact, using the formula, 'What I am looking for ..' (WILF) or 'Remember to ...' for younger children.

The proposed approach made sense as a first step to let teachers get to grips with success criteria and dialoguing with pupils, which was not normal practice. Ruling out negotiation also made sense for the implementation committee since being asked to negotiate with the pupils assumes a constructivist perspective and not many colleagues practised in this way. To see the value of negotiation is to recognise that significant others or peers can support learning. But for many colleagues their view of the teacher as expert, their focus on individuals and their doubts about the value of group work suggest that for them learning is a process of receiving information and processing it internally. Tasks are a means of checking understanding and success criteria are steps to do the task. Hence tasks are viewed as unproblematic givens: the doing of which accomplishes not merely the task, but the learning intention the teacher has stated.

Socioculturalists on the other hand consider learners to be making their own meaning as they engage in tasks so tasks are 'strategic fictions' (Newman et al., 1989, p.135) offering 'a medium of interaction between [the teacher] and the children' (p.92) due to the need to guide and support an evolving sense of a common focus - a joint endeavour - in the community of learners. Beryl and Janice were genuinely concerned about a practice in conflict with their practice and beliefs and those they believed their colleagues share. For them negotiation with pupils is a challenging prospect and their response was to set it to one side as something to think about later. This approach created a dilemma for me as negotiation was central to how I routinely worked with children, and I was faced with the

prospect of another procedural demand - WILF - to add to the previous demand for WALT. Moss (2008) has noted that learning may be impeded if it is assumed to be the acquiring of stable and reasonably well defined knowledge, as was envisaged in the way success criteria were enshrined in the action plan. Teachers need to afford opportunities for 'expansive learning' which she identifies as:

Learning something that is not stable and not even defined or understood ahead of time.

In important transformations of our personal lives and organizational practices, we must learn new forms of activity that are not yet there.

(Engeström, 2001, in Moss 2008, p.232).

The small change, from 'What I am looking for..' to 'What we are looking for...' I requested so as to include the children's views was rejected by the committee referring to NIC documentation, and the importance of all staff implementing the same approach as set out in the action plan. This was a reasonable position to take in the context of how Beryl and Janice were translating the policy requirements in light of their beliefs which were shared by the majority of staff.

Epilogue

With hindsight, for my practice to make sense would require major shifts in thinking which as I had found could only occur if the theoretical tools were available to teachers, and if the space was established for developing these tools through practice. What also coloured people's responses to my attempts to negotiate some changes was that the school no longer fostered a learning culture, but a rigid alignment with policy. It was a risk-averse culture where being seen to do what policy valued was critical to the standing of the new principal and the school. Hall (2004) suggests that compliance with structures beyond the local arena can have consequences for schools, which focus on achieving high inspection grades by slavishly following inspection criteria, as they are unlikely to develop critical and innovative thinking and practices. The school's approach to AfL was constructed with

reference to documentation provided by DENI and Clarke (2003). There was no opportunity for staff to consider aspects of research into formative assessment that might have enabled a more critical awareness. Staff were encouraged to liaise with the implementation team if they were experiencing any difficulties. No-one responded to this invitation.

To be a sociocultural teacher is to recognise connections. While I was working to support the development of connections between and among myself and my learners in the classroom, I was simultaneously connected to my colleagues. Black et al. (2004) argue that a fundamental change in a teacher's pedagogy is required, but this change has to be at the community level within the arena of the school and in the wider community. I was negotiating meaning around boundary objects within the classroom, as well as within the HE academic community, but there was no interconnection between these communities of practice and the school staff community of practice. When the principal discussed the WALT board and liked it she did not succeed in brokering a connection between my practice and the institutional practice.

Although I was not able to influence how AfL was enshrined in policy, I was nevertheless able to enact formative assessment in a distinctively different way that successfully supported children's learning. And this was reflected in achievements, notably in the high level of attainment the children were able to demonstrate in the KS1 assessment at the end of their year with me. This was recognised by the governors who congratulated me, in the absence of the principal, who was on sick-leave at that time (May, 2008). I was meeting the success criteria of the professional community as well as meeting aspects of accountability. Whilst parents had experienced a traditional approach to what it is to be an educated person, many could recognise the change in their children and were prepared to be supportive.

Act Three: Reflections on my own learning – agency denied

In this third act, I highlight my becoming a sociocultural teacher and how it was understood in the community of the school. This act positions me centre stage, reflecting, in the midst of the 2008/2009 developments, on my own learning trajectories. The drama in this act hinges on the tensions that emerged as the principal returned from sick leave and found my practice unacceptable. So this act explores how a sociocultural approach is helpful in understanding my practice, as well as how others viewed it and wanted to shape it.

My new class in September 2008 was made up of children who had never been together as a class. The class included twenty-seven children: seven children from one Y3 class (Mrs Kirkpatrick) and 19 children from the other (Mrs Parke), together with a new boy from another school. Of these 27 children, 6 were on the Special Needs register, including one child, Evie, for whom ‘violent outbursts’ were typical and the advice of the educational psychologist was to ignore shouting and outbursts short of violence. This child was particularly isolated as only one person seemed friendly towards her. A further four of the children from the group of seven were considered by their previous teacher as being isolated, cheeky or dominating. This meant that not only did many of the children not know each other, but some of them knew and disliked each other. For many there was a sense of apprehension and even fear since one of their new classmates had a reputation throughout the school as ‘bad Evie’.

It was my first experience of children from Mrs Parke’s class and I found them to be very dependent on the teacher with no sense of themselves as agentic learners. For Mrs Parke the crucial relationship was the one she had with individual children and this was dependent on the nature of the child’s response. Children were positioned as able or less able and consequently as reaching or failing to reach their potential, with those who were

viewed as achievers or as hardworking triers, enjoying the approval of the teacher. So these children arrived with a sense of competency or incompetency mediated by how they were positioned by the teacher, and how others in the class co-operated with the teacher in supporting this positioning (McDermott, 1996). The dilemma was where to start with these children who came with individual histories of success or failure, with those who had experienced success riding high and regarding others as less successful. These were children used to completing written tasks individually dependent on the teacher for what to do once a particular task was completed.

Developing talking and listening with the children was a priority as it is a fundamental mode through which children could negotiate meaning. Using writing to routinely make available opportunities to narrate their experiences was another priority. So writing journals were offered, along with the opportunity to share their stories or pictures each afternoon.

I knew from talking with the Y3 teachers that writing would not appeal to all the children - e.g. Victor, was described as a 'great artist' who hardly ever had a chance to draw since he was very slow in writing stories - drawing was only allowed after stories were completed. Getting Renée, to write a story was like 'talking to a brick wall' so unresponsive had her teacher found her. But I found the Writing Journal approach effective and noted how individuals were using their writing journals at the end of the first week. My entries for Victor and Renée read:

Victor: Bold, strong illustrations with a sentence or two written about it;

Renée: Lovely little stories with great illustrations and titles, 'My Best Friend' and 'My Teacher'.

(Research notebook 6/9/2008)

And the sharing sessions each afternoon were popular. I noted at the end of the first week:

The writing journal has been going well - no shortage of volunteers to share their stories (Ciaran [one of the children on the special needs register] has also shared a couple of his

books [brought from home] with us - he doesn't talk about them, just turns the pages for the class to see.

(Research notebook 6/9/2008)

However, despite the encouraging beginning, I was finding the class particularly challenging. I noted at the end of the first week:

Struck by how very difficult it is to 'build the rope' [(McDermott, 1996, p.274)] with this particular class. The biggest difficulty I notice at the moment is that the class do not listen to each other, neither particularly to me nor to other teachers (e.g. in Assembly). They are very engrossed in their own conversations, etc. They have plenty to say, which is good, but it is hard to get them involved in the ongoing thinking together of the classroom.

(Research notebook 6/9/2008)

Little by little small changes gave me confidence that the class was moving towards becoming a community of learners. Many more disputes arose among class members than in previous classes. So a practice was introduced to support the children in resolving disputes by having them talk about the problem together. For the children this represented new practice. Hitherto the approach they had experienced was for the teacher to listen to ascertain what had happened during a particular incident and then apportion blame and appropriate consequences. Disputes in the new practice were seen as opportunities to develop a sense of belonging among the children, based on mutual accountability which Wenger regards as essential in a community. An example of how this was beginning to prove effective was noted at the end of the second week:

Today Sasha complained Ciaran was singing such and such as alternative (rude) words to our song, I called him over and she put it to him. He denied it flatly, but another boy overheard and said, 'I heard you'. Immediately Ciaran knew the game was up. I asked him to apologise to those who had heard him, since those were not appropriate school

words. He did so. I really want them to learn that their behaviour matters to their friends in the class, as well as a matter of school rules.

(Research notebook 12/9/2008)

The introduction of new practices was altering relationships in the classroom but was very intensive work figuring out what to introduce and how to do it. The pressure I was feeling was a concern and I approached the principal during this first month to share with her my experience as a colleague in the community in which I was an old-timer. The principal's response was to come back to me with her solution to her construction of the problem, which revealed two distinct viewpoints. For me the issue was *that this was a particularly challenging group of children to support*, for the principal the issue was my inadequacy as a teacher. In her view what was needed was 'discipline', and this was achieved by keeping children 'on task', with no talking and no group work. I reflected on this difference:

It is difficult in the early days of working with a learning community trying to gauge and establish a sense of shared meaning. Trying to sense what the shared repertoire should consist of – perhaps some practices can be continued from the children's previous schooled experience (e.g. how the classroom assistant introduced Finished Work tray – 'some of you had trays for finished work in P3 – we're going to do the same thing, only in a more grown up way ...' (17.10.08). I want the shared repertoire to be meaningfully negotiated, even when I finally say, 'Right, this is the way we'll do this,' (e.g. our ritual for lunch-time prayer) the way we do it has clearly developed from our earlier practice. The need for a more substantial ritual was not apparent in previous years. I need to be sensitive to the rhythms in the learning community *in order to find optimal opportunities for combining these modes* (i.e. engagement, imagination and alignment) – that is why I don't just establish all the routines in week 1 (as Cynthia seems to think is only sensible).

(Research notebook 17/10/2008)

She viewed my approach to her as an admission of incompetence. Appearing to take no cognisance of the successful year I had had in her absence, Cynthia once again implemented team-teaching to support me.

What was normal and unproblematic for me was perceived as problematic by the principal and new vice-principal. This difference turned on views of pedagogy and of learners. For the principal and vice principal who was assigned to team-teach with me, any practice that handed over learning responsibility to children was not teaching, but a lack of management. Children were not positioned as knowledgeable problem-solvers with responsibility for their own learning, and teaching was not guided participation. So my practice to disrupt children's view of knowledge as individual possession and introduce them to ways of working so that expertise could be recognised and valued among and between all participants was problematic. These different ways of making sense of practice are indicated in how children's actions and interactions were viewed.

Victor, was noted as an example of unacceptable behaviour. The principal had on one occasion while in my room witnessed Victor swirling around on his bottom on the floor. She said, 'He was clearly not on task.' I asked her when she had seen this and what the task had been. For her the circumstances were irrelevant - a child swirling could not be on task. A further example of what was seen as acceptable behaviour by children was reported by the vice-principal, Kevin. He had come into the classroom while I was teaching and set a new resource box for the NIC on my desk. He observed two boys come to the desk, open the box and peep into it. This was an example of poor class management, as I continued to work with children on the other side of the room, demonstrating to the vice-principal that I failed to notice the boys misbehaving. He reprimanded the boys and ordered them back to their seats. For Vice-principal Kevin the boys' actions could have resulted in a health and safety issue if there had been something dangerous in the box, or a data-protection issue if the box had contained confidential information.

Children being curious and looking at something official was not a problem, in our practice where paying attention to everything going on in the classroom was encouraged. However for Kevin this was a problem as the children were not obeying rules and my not noticing was encouraging this lack of discipline about what is and is not appropriate for a child to do and be in the school.

Kevin initially validated my practice commenting that he had every confidence in me, and that he would be more than happy to have a child in my class. So I understood I was getting help with the class not with my practice. Furthermore the team-teaching was a special event based around a special resource, using an interactive whiteboard located in Kevin's classroom using my ICT expertise and Kevin's numeracy expertise which reinforced my sense that this was collaborative. Kevin and I met up after most of the team-teaching sessions and Kevin reported to the principal on progress. After Christmas, the principal intervened and the team-teaching was stopped and Kevin became an observer of my teaching. This altered Kevin's relationship with me and meant that feedback was now about my practice and not how to work to support the children. A discrepancy now emerged, between my view of my competence and Kevin's changed view since he was now monitoring me.

In the following section two aspects of practice that Kevin observed on 21 January 2009 and was critical of are discussed to examine how different viewpoints led to quite different understandings.

During the literacy lesson, Kevin observed individual children using, 'I have noticed..' notelets introduced that day for the children to use to 'say something kind', about someone in the class. They were to post their notelets into a box and I would read the comments to them later that afternoon.

This positive comments initiative developed as I worked between my own knowledge of how to support the development of our community of learners and on advice given by

the Pupil Personal Development Services team from the local Education and Library Board. This team had worked during the previous term with staff when a very serious case of bullying involving some children in the class had arisen. One of the central issues identified by the team was that the person being bullied had not spoken of it to anyone. It had only come to light when he was admitted to hospital and disclosed his experiences at school to medical staff. Among the strategies suggested by the team was that a 'comments and concerns' box should be made available for the children to use. What I was doing that day therefore was linked and not separable from the past or the present and responsive to the needs of my learners. My introduction of these new structuring resources was to address wider issues and histories of bullying and to recreate community and mutual accountability. That evening I reflected on this new initiative:

This developed during the day and I was very pleased to see how enthusiastic [the children] were - especially as this involves writing. Later Kevin was in the room, observing as part of Cynthia's programme, and he was unimpressed and felt this was a distraction.

(Research notebook 21/1/2009)

For Kevin teaching was something planned and enacted and not emergent where other participants shape what is possible to learn. So he quite legitimately could observe my teaching, without needing to consider histories of participation. His focus was on the teacher, and what was being achieved in terms of goals he valued, i.e. subject learning. The lesson had a grammar focus, specifically on adjectives, positive comments were therefore irrelevant and he could only see the children's actions in one way - children off task and a teacher, failing to keep them on task.

Kevin also observed, an approach to teaching which allowed for 'wrong answers' which were then made available for others to appropriate. In my practice all the children's ideas were valued and so when non adjectives were offered I accepted those as part of the class's collective explicit knowledge (Cook and Brown's, 1999). As we continued to work

together, individuals would begin to question their inclusion as the class worked together to shape collective understanding with progressively more precision. But the precision was not a given by the teacher, as Kevin told me he would have done, but achieved together with guidance from the teacher during processes of negotiation.

For Kevin, this practice was not fair to the children - why confuse them? His approach, which he described as modelling what an adjective is for the children, would offer a statement An adjective is a word that describes a noun - which to him was full of meaning, but for a sociocultural teacher represents a reification which only gains meaning through participation in practice. The privileging of explicit individual knowledge, is recognised by Cook and Brown (1999, p.384) as a feature of western culture:

Knowledge, particularly anything that might pass as rigorous knowledge, is something that is held in the head of an individual and is acquired, modeled and expressed most accurately in the most objective and explicit terms possible.

Bits of explicit knowledge can make possible epistemic work; successful completion of worksheets created as opportunities to provide right or wrong answers, for example, could conceivably have been managed by some children if they knew what a noun is. But bits of explicit knowledge were insufficient for doing the epistemic work that I wanted to support since my practice was to position the children as agentive and to guide them over time. Through experience they would gain tacit knowledge of how authors used adjectives, as well as of the way they themselves used them. This knowledge would contribute in the formative process to the generation of new group explicit knowledge as collectively we worked to reify our practice.

I reflected later that evening on the experience of trying to communicate to Kevin about my practice:

I tried to argue my case and put forward my sociocultural understanding and how I believe the children developed their understanding in practice of descriptive words and

deepened their familiarity with the term 'adjective'. We parted with no agreement.

(Research notebook 21/1/2009, p.2)

A difficulty was that I used the discourse of sociocultural pedagogy to explain my intentions and actions and Kevin had no access to that. He therefore could not value it, and the principal's response to my practice would undermine the possibility of him doing so. He may legitimately have expected his expertise to be recognised and attended to. So my approach to explain in theoretical terms that he did not have or understand may have been viewed as irritating and/or patronising and unacceptable from someone he was positioned to inculcate into good practice.

Epilogue.

AfL as it is being implemented in the school as a whole does not appear to have had the impact it promised. My enthusiasm for formative assessment is not shared by my colleagues. For them AfL has never developed beyond the procedural way in which it was first introduced. It has become routinised and part of the ritual. Teachers continue to display learning intentions on WALT boards. Foundation Stage teachers read them to the children and question the children during lessons as to what they are learning so that children can answer, or 'parrot back', as Janice, one of the Y1 teachers and a member of the implementation team put it. When I asked a KS1 colleague if she found her WALT board useful, she responded: 'No. In fact, I find it difficult to remember to refer to it when I'm working with the children. I just teach the same way I always did.' For older children WALT boards have become part of day-to-day life in the classroom. For example, Y7 children copy learning intention statements in red ink, at the top of each piece of work. Do you find this useful? I enquired of their teacher. 'Oh, yes.' she responded. But gave no indication of what she felt it contributed. The children know the language of 'learning intentions', but there is no indication that the implementation of AfL has done anything to achieve what was claimed in terms of enhanced attainment.

The Trojan horse effect (Black et al., 2006) as the introduction of AfL strategies became catalysts for fundamental change in teacher/learner relationships has not been enabled. Instead a tight accountability regime ensured no movement in the learning contract between teachers and their learners could take place. In the view of one member of the implementation team, formative assessment has been of limited value. She sees it as simply another 'new thing' among a stream of initiatives: 'Teachers don't get interested in any one thing, as you have [in formative assessment]. They know that next year there will be some other "new thing" coming along, so there's no point in spending time or energy on it.' (Research notebook May 2011).

Kevin identifies 'some limited benefits' of AfL. For him the main thing it promised was having children take more responsibility for their learning. He believes that there has been a change, that has supported that, in the case of a couple of teachers. He identifies this change in their move away from simply giving the children worksheets to discussing learning with the children. He commented with hindsight if the way the school implemented AfL was the best way to support cultural change in classrooms. He was of the view that if the school were implementing it now we would be braver. We would be prepared to say to the inspectors that we have our own way of doing it. But that when we implemented it the focus was on doing it in the way we were told to do it (Research notebook 13/1/2012).

The school is not an isolated example of stultifying adherence to a procedural enactment of AfL. Marshall and Drummond (2006) found a majority of schools focusing on the 'letter' of AfL. That is far from engaging children and positioning them as agentic in negotiating tasks as opportunities to improve performance, Marshall and Drummond (2006, p.140) found that teachers continued to determine what was made available to learn with AfL functioning as a framework for publishing propositional knowledge reifying 'fixed, identifiable, measurable notions of correctness'.

Chapter 5 Reflections

In enacting formative assessment, it is recognised by researchers such as Black and Wiliam that fundamental change in pedagogy is needed. Harrison (2009), reflecting on the impact of AfL ten years on from Black and Wiliam's review, identifies a classroom culture where pupils feel comfortable about revealing current understanding, creating 'real opportunities for thinking and reflection', and with the teacher's role being 'to help sustain and develop the talk and stop it being closed down', as an 'essential ingredient'. By moving pedagogy and formative assessment towards a sociocultural enactment, an even more radical change was introduced which challenged the epistemological basis of what children needed to learn. Cook and Brown's (1999) model is valuable as the different forms of knowledge provide tools for making sense of what is absent in relating the practices of formative assessment in constructivist and social constructivist versions, to points of action or moments of contingency (Black and Wiliam, 2009).

Main findings – the value of the metaphor 'formativity'

Rethinking formative assessment as formativity offers three key insights, for use in teaching as well as in understanding practice.

The focus in a sociocultural epistemology is on its dynamic nature - new knowledge and new ways of knowing are emergent. Hence attending to formativity is to attend to moments when new knowledge is emergent, evidenced in action, interaction, what is said, etc. - what is it that learners are now doing that is different from before? - what is it that is being dynamically afforded in activity as learners work between knowledge as a tool in the service of knowing? Learners through experiences of competency in practice such as becoming writers and narrators discover what they can know and do as 'products of ongoing concrete interaction between "myself" or "ourselves" and the specifics of the

social and physical “context” or “circumstances” they are in at any given time’ (Cook and Brown, 1999, p.389).

The metaphor of formativity (Murphy, 2009) also moves the focus from the isolated individual - even in social constructivist views of formative assessment it is individual learners acquiring knowledge that is in view. But formativity attends also to group knowledge - and Cook and Brown’s model helps understand the relationships involved here - not only is group knowledge valuable in its own right but it is essential for the learning of individuals as whatever they can do or know as individuals is made available to appropriate socially. This is where the teacher needs to attend, supporting the process of ‘bridging epistemologies’ (Cook and Brown, 1999). For example, in the oeuvres explicit collective knowledge is developed, something that is not emphasised in the procedures highlighted in constructivist and social constructivist versions of formative assessment; the latter focus on dialogue, but not on the relationships between collective explicit and tacit knowledge and individual learning. Becoming a writer in my classes entailed coming to a practised understanding of how the community valued writing as a joint enterprise, which is to argue for the value of group tacit knowledge - again something that does not come into view in other theoretical approaches to *formative assessment*.

The frame of reference challenges the predominance of individual explicit knowledge stated in WALT and assessed in terms of success criteria, to allow the positioning of formativity beyond the epistemology of possession and trace it in the interplay between the epistemology of possession and the epistemology of practice. Learning is no longer the acquisition of propositional knowledge, where ‘knowing’ is the application of that knowledge in completing teaching and assessment tasks, instead it is the appropriation by individuals or by groups as part of the process of creating something new emergent in the generative dance - the interplay between tacit and explicit, group and individual knowledge and knowing.

The data confirms the value of Moss's (2008) approach, which builds on many of the same sociocultural tools used in this study drawing on Lave (1988), Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998). Moss's contribution was in the application of these theoretical constructs directly to schooled learning drawing on the insights provided by Lampert (2001). Moss highlights assessment as ongoing in the implicit, the routine, day-to-day social interaction in the classroom, as she puts it: 'much that might be called assessment is simply a routine part of social interaction in a learning environment' (2008, p.254) which would now be the position echoed by Black and Wiliam (2009). This sits well with the 'spirit of AfL' approach, and contrasts with the formulaic, procedural approach to AfL represented in NI policy and taken up by the school. Moss identifies a need for a set of conceptual tools and routines that can be applied, explicitly when needed, that provide actors with adequate information and rules of thumb to shape their daily practice. Moss's work does not at the present time offer insights into what these tools and routines might be that 'support sound, evidence-based interpretations, decisions, and actions when explicit inquiry is not possible' (p.254). The research reported in this thesis developed, used and evaluated some of these tools and routines working between a Wengerian community of practice approach, Rogoff's community of learners, and Cook and Brown's conceptualisation of knowledge and knowing to innovate new practice in my settings.

The research exemplifies a way to support children's becoming writers. Key to this and often absent in other accounts of what constitutes a pedagogy that integrates formative assessment was repositioning writing as an aspect of narrative construal so that 'telling our story' was the joint enterprise in each community of learners. This approach opened up writing for children of this age as something they could understand, see as significant and relevant to their lives, and engage in as a practice that is valued by society and something that adults do. This shift from viewing writing as a school subject to recognising its function pre-eminently as narrative construal emerged out of the dilemma in Class 2,

where the children moved from finding writing difficult and tedious to caring very deeply about it so that the writing event each week became central in our work together. Children were writing at home and through dinner hour and reading and discussing each other's stories each day, while also talking together about the next one they were going to write. Children were actively seeking out the help they needed to produce their stories, as I noticed Stephen do one day in late March, involving a neighbour as a scribe for his ideas. The change in the children's engagement with writing, with the literature led me to conclude that what was motivating the children was their need to figure things out - to make sense of their experiences - which was what I identified as narrative construal, and this in the relational world of the classroom.

In the following year, the sharing sessions each afternoon, together with the opportunity for children to write together as a normal routine, seemed to be the practices that drove the enterprise. Children were continually adding their names and story titles to the waiting list for sharing. They were acting agentively and innovating practice. This was widening the joint enterprise so that Writing Journal time encompassed more than simply print literacy. Widening schooled literacy to encompass 'literacies' is something Hall (2004) has argued as important if children are to become fully literate persons. This widening process was led by the children as they drew on the diversity of their personal experiences and brought them to class literacy times. Just as Dyson (2010 p.25) noted, reflecting on her own research into young children's classroom literacy events: 'children are not homogeneous; the extent and nature of their experiences and written language are shaped by cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic factors, along with personal interests and situational dynamics.'

Despite all the non-writing things children were at times engaged in, it was writing that predominated. In June, a Y1 teaching colleague, who was also the mother of a boy in the class, and who had worked in the classroom an afternoon each week that year,

remarked on how astonished she was that the children all wrote continuously of their own volition. What surprised her was the contrast with her experience. Children did not choose to write - even children who were quite capable writers when given a writing task by their teacher, would not choose to go to the writing corner that she and her foundation stage colleagues had provided, as advised by the Education and Library Board. A sociocultural approach had supported children's engagement in the complex communicative act of writing as a normal part of their everyday lives. This joint enterprise was energised and organised by their agency and their desire to participate fully in shared practices valued in our community of learners.

Au (1997, in Hall, 2004) identifies the importance of 'ownership of literacy' for success in schooling. This research offers insight into how children in classes represented in the study came to experience ownership of literacy. An essential part of the process was the documentation (Armstrong, 2006) of children's products. This afforded opportunity for peer-assessment but importantly in a way that highlighted writing as a means for communication to others. Documentation was a mechanism for evolving a shared sense of what counted as good work in our practice, as well as a way for members to hold each other accountable and to experience themselves as competent. These were opportunities for making available to children, both tacitly and explicitly, how the community valued their writing and them as writers.

Members came to understand each other through their writing. Together we learnt that writing is something people do to make sense. Children were enabled in the security of the respect of their peers to write to make sense of things they were afraid of, or that they longed for - as Carol seemed to be doing in writing about her granda.

Technical power developed within this wider enterprise of narrative construal. For example, when particular literary forms were introduced to the children they incorporated them within their own personal narrative intentions - acrostics for instance were taken up

as a way for children to exercise social agency - as poems were produced, woven around the names of friends from the class, personal needs for companionship, power and pleasure could be discerned. Their texts were relational and not motivated by any desire to satisfy check-lists cataloguing success. Hence feedback was in terms of the meaning children were making. And not how their writing was measuring up to narrowly defined learning intentions. The research rejects versions of formative assessment that rely on narrowly defined learning intentions and success criteria to be ticked. For Dyson (2010, p.25) they are a phenomenon that arose out of social constructions of:

‘proper children’, listening up, attending, following directions, and learning in a newly reinvigorated behaviorist stance - measuring up to learning objectives, with individuals standing as tall as possible against the benchmarked yardstick so that their upward progress can be measured - goals becoming more tightly regimented, more narrowly focused

The research documents how this kind of thinking shaped how formative assessment is enshrined in NI policy and how pedagogical approaches to writing have taken up genre approaches, such as the First Steps program, in ways that were never the intention of their authors. Derewianka (1990, p.4):

A functional approach to language is not concerned with a set of rules which prescribe correct and incorrect usage. . . It does not advocate teaching about language by handing down prescriptive recipes.

Yet this is how First Steps has been approached in its take-up in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Children are positioned as cultural novices and, with close guidance from their teachers, supported to ‘discover’ features of particular texts. Such reifications are then taken to be meaningful for children, something problematic in a sociocultural view, as was discussed in relation to ‘strategic fictions’.

Based on the reified construction of features of the genre a writing journey is mapped out beforehand. Trivial writing tasks that do not engage with children’s need to narrate the

meaning of their lives can, in this approach, become the sum total of children's writing experience. In reflecting on what the research journey delivered for the actors in my unfolding drama, it became challenging for children who were successful writers in my Y4 classes to sustain trajectories as writers when they moved up the school. I talked with Claire and Linzi during the summer term of 2009/2010. They were then in Y7. We talked about our memories of Y4 and the *Clever Mice*. 'I still have that book of stories,' Linzi told me. I asked them what they were currently writing. 'Nothing much,' said Claire. 'We do have ideas,' said Linzi, 'but we have too much homework.' For others it appeared that the nature of the writing they were expected to do did not correspond with their understanding of the joint enterprise. I talked with Brian (see act 1) about how he was enjoying Y5, in November 2007. 'It's OK,' he said. 'What have you been writing?' I asked. 'I don't do writing anymore,' he told me. The walls of his Y5 classroom were covered with children's written products, including some of Brian's, yet for Brian these held no significance and his identity was no longer tied up with being a writer.

Action research and sociocultural methodology

Socioculturalism offers little by way of methodology outside of activity theory which attends to improvement in local systems rather than within the dynamic of ongoing activity (Lave, 1988). Consequently it has been necessary to work with sociocultural theory to evolve an authentic sociocultural approach. There is an absence of practitioner research that applies sociocultural theorising, so the study represents a unique contribution because of this, and in the particular combination of circumstances: the young age of the pupils – most of the research into formative assessment has focused on older children; the context in Northern Ireland – AfL has been enshrined in policy in a way that has left out the views of some and expects alignment.

Edwards (2000) argues that action research from a sociocultural approach allows the possibility of learning collectively as part of a community recognising the benefits of the dialectic relationships between settings and arenas. But it was not possible for the research to be conducted in this way as particular constraints made learning in the community of practice of teachers problematic. Not least that the policy and institutional take-up aligned AfL practices with what Marshall and Drummond (2006) term the 'letter of AfL' where AfL is restricted to carrying out procedures to the letter without subsequent change in pedagogy to reflect changing understanding of the learner as agentic and autonomous. A sociocultural approach which sees learning as relational and which challenges the nature of what is to be learned goes beyond the 'spirit of AfL' as defined by Marshall and Drummond who draw on social constructivist theorising which still retains a local model of mind and an individual epistemology. Hence, a very different understanding of what is effective practice and valued learning, led to the changes initiated as part of the research being interpreted by colleagues as a move towards more ineffective practice - one teaches less, as the children take more responsibility, and one disciplines less, as children are increasingly accountable to each other and the teacher in the community.

In a sociocultural approach to action research, action is viewed as 'systemically constructed and constructing' (Edwards, 2000, p.201). Dialectical relationships are always ongoing, shaping and influencing what it is possible for actors to do and be. Using sociocultural tools has supported learning about the institution and the policy. Working with the children with a focus on mediated interaction, turned out to be sustainable only in so far as agency was afforded to me by actors beyond the interpersonal plane. This was evident in the progress achieved by children in Act 2 where I experienced liberation that was subsequently reversed in Act 3. The children's histories of participation were also a mediational factor as discussed but the findings show too how teachers' practice is dependent on the degree to which participation and reification are controlled by senior

managers. The kinds of meaning that could be created by teachers and children when negotiating practice and the kinds of people teachers and children could become depends on how power is exercised to control. There were times in the research when control was relaxed as reification in policy was not backed up with policing of participation and I experienced more freedom to negotiate at local level. But this was not followed through by extending opportunity to participate in renegotiation of the reification of formative assessment at the arena level. So progress in practice was constrained by the controlling influence of the principal, holding teachers to account in terms of the narrowly framed reification of formative assessment practice in policy. Prior collegiate processes that enabled ongoing reconciliation of conflicting interpretations of the joint enterprise under new management, were disrupted. Conflict was now resolved by demanding alignment with tightly controlled reifications.

This raises two issues – on one hand it confirms the value of the sociocultural tools for uncovering dialectical relationships as events unfolded, revealing how the various actors were shaped by forces within and without the institution and by personal positions and beliefs. Change may begin in ‘hybrid space’, but it is in the nature of change to impact beyond hybrid spaces and to create ripples in every direction. Traditional action research takes no cognisance of this dialectic and this is why it is proposed by researchers as suitable for class teachers.

On the other hand, analysis using the sociocultural tools raises the question of whether the site of the research was a community of teachers, in Wengerian terms. Wenger (1998) recognises that communities of practice are spawned in all organisations as people build histories of doing things together. However he points out that although they are by nature self-organising, they need to be encouraged and nurtured, requiring places and occasions to congregate, time to do things together and institutional room to take initiative. The potential for the emergence of a joint enterprise, arising out of processes of negotiation

may be undermined in an economy of meaning with a plurality of perspectives.

Communities typically reach alignment through shared ownership of meaning through processes such as negotiating, persuading, inspiring, trusting and delegating. However those in power may instead create discourses that constitute claims of ownership of issues and these devalue the understanding of others in the community.

Challenges and recommendations

Challenges

The research into my learning trajectories, revealing how my agency was undermined and the children's opportunities to learn constrained, raises challenges to those who hold institutional power to support rather than displace the knowledgeability of practice.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005) identify a fundamental problem in the idea of 'teacher as researcher'. It is one thing for practitioners to carry out action research in terms of informing good practice. This is generally acknowledged as valuable. But it is quite another matter for practitioner action research to make claims to generating quality theory which is how Edwards (2000) positions the potential and purpose of sociocultural action research. McNiff and Whitehead point to systemic separation of theory and practice, with both teacher communities and scholarly communities working to maintain asymmetric relations of epistemological power - teachers protect their ontological identity as practitioners and higher education institutes are seen as sites of knowledge generation.

Viewed in this way, the research can be seen as offering a challenge to hegemonic pedagogy enshrined in policy. For the principal to support my practice she would be taking a stand against this deeply entrenched divide and against many of her staff and senior management. This is something McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.2) argue for:

Professional education discourses themselves must reflect the values of democratic participation, in which asymmetric relations of epistemological power are

transformed so that all are acknowledged as capable of generating knowledge and participating in debates about the validity and legitimacy of knowledge claims.

The ebb and flow of change in my practice can be mapped on to dynamic processes Wenger (1998, p.248) identifies within organisational 'fields of negotiability'. Local movement deeper into practice proceeded or stalled, depending upon institutional processes of 'opening and closing, shrinking and expanding, or tightening and loosening a field of negotiability'. Hence the importance of paying attention to such fields of negotiability.

Recommendations

The research has shown how a sociocultural approach not only changes the nature of practice and teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships but also what is recognised and valued as knowledge. This study has highlighted an approach to writing as narrative construal. Further practitioner research with older children that allows understanding of 'sustainable assessment' (Boud et al., 2008) would be very valuable. Such research would make connections between current identities as members of a community of learners and establish projected goals for future trajectories in tune with that joint enterprise. Extending this research into other subject domains would also help to consider if sociocultural tools enable the change in engagement and participation that this research found. It would also raise the question of what constitutes progression in subjects when a sociocultural epistemology is applied.

Using sociocultural tools as exemplified in this study would allow others who want to implement change in practice to have insights into the complexities of the interactional web, including mediation with other planes, in which they work. Information gleaned from such an analysis, might contribute to a problem-solving approach to institutional change (Lave, 1988) in which dilemmas could be framed that it might be possible to address (Wenger, 1998, p.248):

The field of negotiability affects how members perceive the scope of their influence and purview of their contributions. It will therefore affect what they attempt to understand, what problems they try to address, and how they direct their inventiveness. It will affect what they do with the information and resources that are available and what information and resources they see.

Moss (2008) stresses the importance of the capacities of teachers to use evidence to support student learning, which raises questions as to the extent to which the institutions in which they work provide the resources they need to do so. Her conclusion that opportunities to learn afforded to teachers and other education professionals must be considered at policy and institutional level is a recommendation endorsed by this study. It is an issue for policy-makers with responsibility for how learning is enshrined in NI policy to ask: Whose views are considered? Whose voices are left out? Who is made to align and why?

This also extends to consideration of how professional learning of teachers is enshrined in policy. Top-down rolling out of a constant stream of initiatives in an accountability framework puts pressure on school management, and can contribute to the development of a regime of compliance. In such a regime, 'doing AfL' may be equated with 'doing formative assessment' without looking more deeply into the impact this implementation is having on teachers' teaching and children's learning.

Spenceley (2009, p.8), who was one of the KMOFAP teachers, sees the failure of many schools to reap the rewards promised by AfL, as attributable to failure in processes of teacher education, as in cases when: 'policy X or initiative Y are introduced immediately, and then [followed] with the threat of observations to ensure that things are being done'. He contrasts this with effective implementation:

Where staff are supported in exploring an initiative until they begin to realise that they (and their students) are suffering by not incorporating it . . . Key to successful implementation is encouraging and sharing 'good practice' among and between

teachers: If what is required is a change in teaching style then surely teachers should be given the opportunity to talk about their teaching?

Wenger (1998, p.249) contrasts an 'extractive' approach to learning within an organisation with an 'integrative' one. In the former, requirements, descriptions, artefacts, and other elements of practice, are transformed into institutional artefacts (course, manuals, procedures, and the like) and then redeployed in reified form, as if they could be uprooted from the specificities and meaningfulness of practice. For Wenger, this kind of extractive training ignores an organisation's most valuable learning resource: practice itself.

Integrative training schemes focus on practice and seek 'points of leverage' at which design can support learning. They are characterised by:

- 1) Construction of learning as a process of participation, whether for newcomers or old-timers;
- 2) Emphasis on learning rather than teaching by finding leverage points to build on learning opportunities offered by practice;
- 3) Engaging communities in the design of their practice as a place of learning
- 4) Giving communities access to the resources they need to negotiate their connections with other practices and their relation with the organization – these resources create a rhythm of engagement, imagination, and alignment.

In this view classroom instruction or training supplements, and does not substitute for, the learning potential inherent in practice. Such an approach would allow this research to be shared and become part of local deliberation.

To achieve the approach to institutional change recommended here depends on two factors: NI policy on AfL would need to be framed more widely. Arena managers could not be expected to give a single member of staff a hearing if it appeared that her ideas were out of sync with policy. This suggests that democracy demands a place at the policy-making table for socioculturalists. A second factor, on which a Wengerian integrative approach to the implementation of new initiatives would depend, is the nature of the

community of practice of staff in a particular school. There would perhaps be a need for more research to investigate this. Although extensive research has been done into communities of practice, it seems to be the case that most of this research has been carried out in communities of practice where power is more distributed than in the arena where I researched.

Limitations

There were constraints that were practical between the tension of teaching and researching but the journal helped with that. I would identify some weakness in data collection methods. For example, there would have been great value in having video footage sampling interaction in the other classes as well as the case study of the two girls writing together in Class 2. I found the videoing immensely rich as a way to capture the interaction. This was particularly so as I was able to go back to it again and again and, as my knowledge of sociocultural theory deepened, uncover further complexity. It is a method I would plan to use more extensively in a future study. The research would have been enhanced by more detail of children's talk about themselves as writers. This is something that I toyed with, trying to figure out the kinds of questions I could ask children. The most successful approach was talking with the children I had videoed while watching the video with them. I have since come across a possible technique that others have found successful in uncovering feelings, perceptions and attitudes that might not emerge through direct questioning. This is the projective technique of 'talking stones' (Davies, 2008), which is something I would explore with the children were I doing this study again.

It would also have strengthened the study had I been able to engage Cynthia and Kevin more in the research. As events unfolded communication became progressively more problematic, although it was possible to have some conversation with Kevin towards the latter stages. One of the challenges I experienced was in being able to articulate the

sociocultural theory. Reading and working with the children enabled a tacit knowledge at first and it took quite a long time for me to be able to learn how to be able to discuss the ideas with colleagues. Looking back I wonder what might have changed, if I had had the confidence to trust my own professionalism when challenged by the incoming principal - even though I could not theorise my practice maybe I could have negotiated for a more equitable resolution to a problem the principal construed.

Final reflections

I find it tantalising, when I cast my mind back to the summer of 2008, to consider McDermott's (1996) observation that every moment is on the verge of becoming something different. In autumn 2008 both the principal and I had to make decisions. For the principal, she acted to transform effective practice into problematic practice and to move me from central participation to the periphery. The only way this could be achieved in a sociocultural world was to deny my competency (in spite of the evidence to the contrary). This was achieved in a number of ways through institutional practices that made visible that my practice was not acceptable and did not belong to this community.

I could have chosen passivity, falling back into practices valued institutionally. But this was not an option because of the transformation and emancipation I had experienced. You cannot unknow what you know. There is no road back, only forward. In the debacle that ensued, I have struggled to maintain my practice and have found support from within the scholarly community. This thesis is evidence of that support. And I have found support from my trade union. In July 2010, my trade union case-worker wrote to the chair of the board of governors, formally invoking the Policy to Combat Bullying and Harassment, as set out in TNC 2009/11 at paragraph 4.3.1. I would ask the question of researchers who advocate these fundamental changes: who has the responsibility for ensuring the safety of those teachers who take on their challenge for the sake of their

learners? The professional risks involved in this study have been enormous. At the same time, the knowledge in practice gained, when I look back to what I envisaged in my research proposal, has far exceeded expectations.

To support a move from a teaching to a learning curriculum (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as is required in a sociocultural view of learning and teaching requires viewing teachers as knowledgeable and displaying trust for both teachers and learners at institutional arena level and beyond at policy level. My agency as an experienced practitioner was denied and I was positioned as non-compliant in a culture of compliance, with observation in my classroom through the lens of a teaching curriculum yielding a long list of deficits.

An example of a different and empowering approach taken by senior management in the face of concerns about behaviour management is offered by Peacock (2011). In her case, senior managers worked to establish and develop a community characterised by co-agency. Horizontal expertise was enabled as the views of staff, children and parents were sought. For Peacock, as incoming principal, the task was not troubleshooting but ascertaining and building on strengths - her rationale:

If the teachers were empowered, inspired and knowledgeable, then the children's engagement and attainment would increase.

(Peacock, 2011, p.23)

Her means to achieve this she described as 'a journey of trusting teachers and children' within a community 'where each individual (child and adult) would be trusted to challenge themselves and to learn as part of a community of excellence.' For Peacock, enforcing compliance on the part of teachers is to undermine learning - she cites Alexander (2009, p.308 in Peacock, 2011, p.24): 'Pupils will not learn to think for themselves, if their teachers are expected to do as they are told.'

References

- Armstrong, M. (2006) *Children Writing Stories*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Armstrong, M. (1994) 'Another way of looking', in Bourne, J. (ed) *Thinking through primary practice*, London, Routledge.
- BERA (2011) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*, London, British Educational Research Association, [online], www.bera.ac.uk (Accessed 18/9/2011).
- Black, P. (2005) 'Formative assessment: views through different lenses', *The Curriculum Journal*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 133-135. (Accessed 20/06/06).
- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2003) *Assessment for Learning: Putting it into Practice*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2002) *Working Inside the Black Box: assessment for learning in the classroom*. London, nferNelson.
- Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. (2004) 'Working inside the black box: assessment for learning in the classroom', *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 86, no. 1, pp. 9-21.
- Black, P., McCormick, R., James, M. and Pedder, D. (2006) 'Learning how to learn and Assessment for Learning: a theoretical inquiry', *Research Papers in Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 119-132. (Accessed 13/07/06).
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (2009) 'Developing the theory of formative assessment', *Educational assessment, evaluation and accountability*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 5-31.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D., (2006) 'Developing a Theory of Formative Assessment', in Gardner, J. (ed) *Assessment and Learning*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D., (2005) 'Changing teaching through formative assessment: research and practice The King's-Medway-Oxfordshire Formative Assessment Project', in Secretary-General OECD (ed) *Formative assessment: improving learning in secondary classrooms*, Paris, Organisation for economic co-operation and development (OECD).

- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (2003) "'In Praise of Educational Research": formative assessment.', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 623-637. (Accessed 12/10/2005).
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998a) 'Assessment and classroom learning', *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 7-74. [online], <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0969595980050102> (Accessed 7 August 2009).
- Black, P. and Wiliam, D. (1998b) *Inside the Black Box*, London, nferNelson.
- Boud, D., Hawke, G. and Falchikov, N., (2008) 'Changing pedagogy: vocational learning and assessment', in Murphy, P. and McCormick, R. (eds) *Knowledge and practice: representations and identities*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Bredo, E. (1999) 'Reconstructing Educational Psychology', in Murphy, P. (ed) *Learners, Learning and Assessment*, London, Paul Chapman Publishers.
- Broadfoot, P., Daugherty, R., Gardner, J., Harlen, W., James, M. and Stobart, G. (2002) *Assessment for Learning: Research-based Principles to Guide Classroom Practice*, Assessment Reform Group. [online], <http://www.assessment-reform-group.org/publications.html> (Accessed 27/4/2011).
- Bruner, J. (1996) *The Culture of Education*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
- Bruner, J.S. (1986) *Actual minds, possible worlds*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London, Harvard University Press.
- Calkins, L. (1986) *The Art of Teaching Writing*, Portsmouth, N.H., Heinemann.
- CCEA (2006) *The Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum: Planning for Implementation*, Belfast, Council for the curriculum examinations and assessment, [online], <http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/about/> (Accessed 27/4/2011).
- Clarke, S. (2005) *Formative Assessment in Action: Weaving the Elements Together*, London, Hodder Arnold.

Clarke, S. (2001) *Unlocking Formative Assessment: Practical strategies for enhancing pupils' learning in the primary classroom*, London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Clarke, S. (2003) *Enriching feedback in the primary classroom : oral and written feedback from teachers and children*, London, Hodder and Stoughton.

Cook, S.D.N. and Brown, J.S. (1999) 'Bridging Epistemologies: The Generative Dance between Organizational Knowledge and Organizational Knowing', *Organization Science*, vol. 10, no. 4, pp. 381-400. [online], <http://www.jstor.org/pss/2640362> (Accessed 3/3/2009).

Davies, S. (2008) 'Becoming and being 'people like us': a study of students who experience difficulties with literacy in National Curriculum History at Key Stage 3', Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (2005) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, (3rd edn) Thousand Oaks ; London, Sage Publications.

Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2005) *Key Stage 1 Programmes of Study and Attainment Targets*, , [online], <http://www.deni.gov.uk/> (Accessed 28 April 2011).

Department of Education for Northern Ireland (1998) *A Strategy for the Promotion of Literacy and Numeracy in Primary and Secondary Schools in Northern Ireland*, Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

Derewianka, B. (1990) *Exploring How Texts Work*, Newtown NSW Australia, Primary English Teaching Association.

Dougary, G. (2010) 'Sex, lies and poetry: How I made the worst mistake of my life', *The Times (London)*, 30/01/2010, p. 39.

Douglas, J.D. (1976) *Investigative social research : individual and team field research*, Beverly Hills ; London, Sage Publications.

Drummond, M.J. (2003) *Assessing children's learning*, (2nd edn) London, David Fulton.

Dyson, A. (1989) *Multiple Worlds of Child Writers: Friends Learning to Write*, New York, Teachers College Press.

Dyson, A. and Genishi, C. (2005) *On the Case: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research*, New York, Teachers College Press.

Dyson, A.H. (2010) 'Writing childhoods under construction: re-visioning 'copying' in early childhood', *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 7-31.

Education Department of Western Australia (2004) *First Steps Writing Developmental Continuum*, Salem, M.A., Steps Professional Development and Consulting.

Edwards, A. (2000) 'Looking at action research through the lenses of sociocultural psychology and activity theory', *Educational Action Research*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 195-204. (Accessed 27/10/2011).

Eisner, E.W. (1990) 'The meaning of alternative paradigms for practice', in Guba, E.G. (ed) *The Paradigm Dialog*, Newbury Park, Calif.; London, Sage Publications.

Ellis, S. and Friel, G. (1995) *Aspects of the Craft of Writing*, Leamington Spa, Scholastic Ltd.

Ercikan, K. and Roth, W. (2006) 'What Good Is Polarizing Research Into Qualitative and Quantitative?', vol. 35, no. 5, pp. 14-24.

Fay, B. (1987) *Critical social science: liberation and its limits*, Cambridge, Polity.

Fontana, D. and Fernandes, M. (1994) 'Improvements in mathematics performance as a consequence of self-assessment in Portuguese primary school pupils', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 64, pp. 407-417.

Graves, D. (1983) *Writing: teachers and children at work*, Exeter, N.H., Heinemann Educational.

Hall, K. (2004) *Literacy and schooling: towards renewal in primary education policy*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

Harrison, C. (2009) 'Assessing impact of assessment for learning ten years on', *Curriculum Management*, pp. 4-10.

- Holland, D., Lachicotte Jr, W., Skinner, D. and Cain, C., (2008) 'Positional Identities', in Murphy, P. and Hall, K. (eds) *Learning and practice: agency and identities*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Ivinson, G. and Murphy, P. (2007) *Rethinking single sex teaching*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.
- James, M. (2006) 'Assessment, teaching and theories of learning', in Gardner, J. (ed) *Assessment and learning*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lampert, M. (2001) *Teaching problems and the problems of teaching*, New Haven; London, Yale University Press.
- Lather, P. (1986) 'Issues of validity in openly ideological research: between a rock and a soft place', *Interchange*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 63-84.
- Lave, J. (1988) *Cognition in practice: mind, mathematics and culture in everyday life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Lincoln, Y.S. (1990) 'The making of a constructivist: a remembrance of transformations past', in Guba, E.G. (ed) *The Paradigm Dialog*, Newbury Park, Calif.; London, Sage Publications.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*, California, Sage Publications, Inc.
- Marshall, B. (2004) 'Goals or horizons - the conundrum of progression in English: or a possible way of understanding formative assessment in English', *The Curriculum Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 101-113. [online], www.tandfonline.com (Accessed 22/10/2011).
- Marshall, B. and Drummond, M. (2006) 'How teachers engage with assessment for learning: lessons from the classroom', *Research Papers in Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 133-149.

McDermott, R.P. (1996) 'The acquisition of a child by a learning disability', in Chaiklin, S. and Lave, J. (eds) *Understanding Practice: Perspectives on Activity and Context*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

McNally, J. (2006) *Young Voiceworks: Thirty-two songs for young singers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Mercer, N. (2000) *Words and Minds: How we use language to think together*, London, Routledge.

Miller, P.J. and Goodnow, J.J. (1995) 'Cultural Practices: Toward an Integration of Culture and Development', *New Directions for Child Development*, vol. 67, pp. 5-16.

Moss, P.A. (2008) 'Sociocultural Implications for Assessment 1: Classroom Assessment', in Moss, P.A., Pullin, D.C., Gee, J.P., Haertel, E.H. and Young, L.J. (eds) *Assessment, equity, and opportunity to learn*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Moss, P.A. (2007) 'Reconstructing validity', *Educational Researcher*, vol. 36, no. 8, pp. 470-476. [online], <http://edr.sagepub.com/content/36/8/470> (Accessed 16/8/2011).

Moss, P.A. (1994) 'Can there be validity without reliability?', *Educational Researcher*, vol. 23, no. 2, pp. 5-12. [online], <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1176218> (Accessed 22/10/2011).

Moss, P.A., Pullin, D.C., Gee, J.P., Haertel, E.H. and Young, L.J. (eds) (2008) *Assessment, equity, and opportunity to learn*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Murphy, P. (2009) 'Applying a sociocultural approach to assessment theory and practice: issues for summative and formative assessment', *Assessment issues and practice conference*, Queensland University of Technology, Australia, September 2009,

Murphy, P. and Ivinson, G. (2005) 'Gender, Assessment and Students' Literacy Learning: implications for formative assessment.', *Teacher Development: an international journal of teachers' professional development*, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 185-200.

Murphy, P. and Ivinson, G. (2003) 'Pedagogy and Cultural Knowledge: a sociocultural perspective', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 5-9.

- Murphy, P.F. (1999) 'Introduction', in Murphy, P.F. (ed) *Learners, learning and assessment*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Newman, D., Griffin, P. and Cole, M. (1989) *The Construction Zone: Working for cognitive change in schools*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Nutbrown, C. (2001) 'Wide eyes and open minds: observing, assessing and respecting children's early achievements', in Collins, J. and Cook, D. (eds) *Understanding Learning: Influences and Outcomes*, London, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- Peacock, A. (2011) 'A transformative approach to school improvement', *The association for science education*, no. 120, pp. 23-25.
- Penuel, W. and Wertsch, J. (1995) 'Vygotsky and Identity Formation: A Sociocultural Approach', *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp. 83-92.
- Pryor, J. and Crossouard, B. (2007) 'A socio-cultural theorisation of formative assessment', *Oxford Review of Education*, [online], <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054980701476386> (Accessed 30 July 2007).
- Regional Training Unit (2005) *Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Handbook: A resource for governors, principals, teachers and external advisers*, Belfast, Regional Training Unit.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984) *Time and Narrative*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Robson, C. (1993, 2002) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, (Second edn) Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.
- Rogoff, B. (2003) *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*, New York, Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B. (1998) 'Cognition as a collaborative process', in Kuhn, D. and Siegler, R.S. (eds) *Cognition, Perceptions and Language*, (5th edn), New York, John Wiley & Sons.
- Rogoff, B. (1997) 'Evaluating Development in the Process of Participation: Theory, Methods, and Practice Building on Each Other', in Amsel, E. and Renninger, K. (eds)

Change and Development: Issues of Theory, Method, and Application, Mahwah, New Jersey, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers.

Rogoff, B. (1995) 'Observing Sociocultural activity on three planes: participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship', in Wertsch, J., Del Rio, P. and Alvarez, A. (eds) *Sociocultural studies of mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Rogoff, B. (1990) *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Rogoff, B., Paradise, R., Mejia Arauz, R., Correa-Chavez, M. and Angelillo, C. (2003) 'Firsthand learning through intent participation', *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 54, pp. 175-203.

Rogoff, B., Turkanis, C. and Bartlett, L. (2001) *Learning together: children and adults in a school community*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Sfard, A. (2006) 'Participationist Discourse on Mathematics Learning', in Maasz, J. and Schloeglmann, W. (eds) *New Mathematics Education Research and Practice*, Rotterdam, Sense Publications.

Solomon, N., Boud, D. and Rooney, D., (2008) 'The In-between: Exposing Everyday Learning at Work', in Hall, K., Murphy, P. and Soler, J. (eds) *Pedagogy and Practice: Culture and Identities*, London, Sage Publications Ltd.

Spenceley, P. (2009) 'Case Study: Ten year of assessment for learning - a personal view.', *Curriculum Management*, pp. 7-10.

Stake, R.E. (1995) *The art of case study research: perspectives on practice*, Thousand Oaks, Calif. ; London, Sage.

The Open University (2007) E891 *Educational enquiry*, Part 6, 'The politics and ethics of educational research', Milton Keynes, The Open University.

The Open University (2001) 'Teachers and Learning', in Collins, J., Burgess, H., Craft, A., Insley, K., Cook, D. and Soler, J. (eds) *Developing practice in primary education*, Milton Keynes, The Open University.

Torrance, H. and Pryor, J. (2001) 'Developing formative assessment in the classroom: using action research to explore and modify theory', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 26, no. 5, pp. 615-631.

Vygotsky, L. (1981) 'The genesis of higher mental functions', in Wertsch, J.V. (ed) *The Concept of activity in Soviet psychology*, Armonk, N.Y.; London, Sharpe; distributed by Eurospan.

Wells, G. (1999) *Dialogic inquiry: towards a socio-cultural practice and theory of education*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wenger, E. (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Wertsch, J.V. (1991) *Voices of the mind: a sociocultural approach to mediated action*, London, Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Appendices

- A) Sample page from Research Notebook (RN 23.2.2007 p.3)**
- B) Sample of audio transcription**
- C) Scanned page from Governors' Report 2006/2007**
- D) Section of School Development Plan 2006/2007**
- E) Example of parental consent letter**

I am ^{with them} reading - ie focusing on "inhabiting their story" - around Alexander 3rd point ^{it's especially}
(see Feb 3rd's notes) Speculating together about the story & its in and out - as W. says using questions to help them develop ideas & write them in. I'm finding when I ask 'what does it mean?' How did they die? the children have very definite clear ideas - my role is to support them in writing the ideas down not just skipping on to tell the story - they need to realise the story they have to help the reader understand the events of the story.

When it comes to "marking" this is about me responding to the story as a reader -
I want to inhabit & find out what the power this story contains (however elemental)
what has Andrew (or whom) been saying here - it's about an individual's authoritative power. [This has been a major development for me in my learning about teaching writing - the focus has shifted for me from how does this piece match up to some standard idea I have in mind - eg is it long enough? or whatever]
I feel I am coming at it with a kind of humility - what can I be challenged by in this creative act of another human - what will S. capture & project as the scary things in life - where does excitement lie for J. - reading his partner's story helps me to understand him as a learner - how he quizzed me up & down about ballot boxes, the election & involved about every part of my quick sketch of the ~~context~~ polling office - negotiation & keen to

Appendix B Pages from a transcription of audio recording.

First encounter with my class of 2006/2007

The following transcript represents an audio recording (2m 40s) made during a fifteen minute observation of the class working with the class teacher in June 2006. The children are seated in pairs. The tables are grouped together, with one exception. Each child has a worksheet on the desk in front of him or her.

() indicates a pause

italics - spoken more loudly

1	Teacher & Class	...the smallest area <i>red</i> .	Reading together - chorused - teacher's voice dominating.
2	Teacher	Look at those shapes! Get your	The children follow instructions and the teacher walks around looking to check which shape they are indicating. Pauses to speak to one pupil (volume of voice remains as before)
3		finger on the one with the	
4		<i>smallest</i> area and I'll see if you're	
5		right. What shape has the	
6		smallest area, Stephen? ¹ () Which	
7		of those shapes has the smallest	Addressed to person seated in the same group as Stephen.
8		area - 1, 2, 3 or 4? ()	
9		Keep him right, Jane. Where's he	
10		looking? Which of these have the	
11		smallest area? Yes () It's the	
12		triangle. Good boy. It's number	
13		3. It's the triangle.	
14		So that's going to be	addressed to an individual as the teacher moves along checking which shape each child is indicating
15		- you're on the wrong one! -	
		so that's going to be what colour?	
		()	

¹ Names are changed to preserve anonymity.

16		Red.	
17		Let's read the instructions for the	
18		<i>bottom</i> part.	Small murmur as several children reply "Red".
19			Immediately the children begin to say "Red" the teacher says Red and sweeps on to the next
20			question.
21			
22			
23			

Appendix C Page from Governors' Report 2005/2006, referring to my successful completion of MA (Ed) and commencement of doctoral studies. Names of classroom assistants and of the school have been digitally obscured.

NON-TEACHING STAFF

1 Full Time Secretary	36 hours per week
1 Clerical Assistant	23 hours per week
1 Clerical Assistant	15 hours per week
1 Clerical Assistant	10 hours per week
1 Classroom Assistant (Language Unit)	32.5 hours per week
1 Classroom Assistant (I Can Centre)	30 hours per week
2 Classroom Assistants (Special Needs)	27.5 hours per week
1 Classroom Assistant (Special Needs)	25 hours per week
3 Classroom Assistants (Special Needs)	15 hours per week
2 Classroom Assistants (Primary 1)	16 hours per week
1 Caretaker	36 hours per week
2 Senior Supervisory Assistants	7.5 hours per week
6 Supervisory Assistants	7.5 hours per week
3 Cleaners	12.5 hours per week
1 Cleaner	9 hours per week
1 Cleaner	2.5 hours per week
1 School Crossing Patrol	12.5 hours per week

Some of our staff have taken part in courses to further their professional development. Mrs Sheena Herron completed her Master of Arts in Education in October and is now working towards a Doctorate. I [redacted], K [redacted], P [redacted] and K [redacted] completed the Elklan Level 3 Speech and Language Course. Congratulations to all of them.

The Governors very much appreciate the efforts of all members of staff, teaching and non teaching, in providing the environment in which our children can realise their full potential. [redacted] is indeed fortunate to have such a highly motivated and talented staff who work tirelessly to ensure that our pupils have access to the best educational experiences possible. The high standards achieved by the pupils are a reflection of the excellent work of all members of staff.

Appendix D Section of School Development Plan 2006/2007, including my doctoral study

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PRIORITIES		
2006/2007	2007/2008	2008/2009
Pastoral Care Action Plan Establish Breakfast Club Staff Personnel Board Photographic Display in Reception Establish Head Teacher Awards Enhance Profile of School - Leaflets, Publicity, B Clubs...	Extended Schools - After School Provision Evaluate and Manage Impact of Falling Enrolment on School Provision, Morale, Curriculum & Use of Building Sensory Garden - KS1 Review Rewards System Speech & Language Unit - Extend Links	Explore Possibility of Charter Mark Audit Community Links
REVISED CURRICULUM: Complete Stages 2, 3 and 4 Begin 5 Planning and Training for Yrs 1 & 5 Nursery Action Plan Enriched Curriculum - S & L Unit Observe Good Practice	General Learning Areas Statutory: Yrs 1 & 5 Planning and Training for Yrs 2 & 6 Follow up Training/Planning Yrs 1 & 5 Pupil Profile Statutory Yr 5 Stage 5 Focus - Assessment For Learning Review Marking, Assessment, Recording and Reporting Policies and Practice	General Learning Areas Statutory: Yrs 2 & 6 Planning and Training for Yrs 3, 4 & 7 Follow up Training/Planning Yrs 2 & 6 Pupil Profile Statutory Yrs 1 & 2 Action Plan on The Arts
ICT Accreditation - Consult with Yr 5 & 6 to aid Yr 7 completion ICT Action Plan Timetabling - Use of Expertise Monitoring and Evaluation of Standards in L & T	Review Literacy Planning Format to Ensure Continuity	Review Planning Format for Other Areas of Curriculum
Speech and Language Project Action Plan (Year 1) Speech and Language Project starting in Year 2		
Self Evaluation - Whole School Identification of Priorities Create New SDP in line with Department Regulations Budget Review and Implications on Staffing I CAN Service Development Plan	Review SDP in light of Revised Curriculum and Changing Circumstances/Audit Curriculum Areas in The Arts Management Restructure - Assess Requirements & Re-organise	Year 3 Audit of SDP - Draft New Plan Identify and Implement Action Plan for The Arts
CZK New Managed Service - Phase 1 Review of PRSD Scheme - Complete 2nd Cycle Policy & Curriculum Review Taking Account of SENDO, Revised Curriculum and Clarifying Progression: P.E., Science & Technology, Numeracy, ICT, Structured Play Review Induction Policy Create Staff Handbook & Staff Development, Disposal of Records & Complaints Policies Staff Development including: (IPQs), Revised Curriculum, SEN, Pastoral Care, Science & Tech, PQR, Research, Incentives to Children's Learning, Safer Schools, Interactive Whiteboard, Child Protection and Preventing Learning Programmes, Speech & Language Project, Enriched Curriculum...	Phase 2 of CZK Implementation of New Service PRSD - Review 2nd Cycle & Complete 3rd Cycle Policy & Curriculum Review Taking Account of SENDO, Revised Curriculum and Clarifying Progression: History and Geography Review Salary Policy Review Handwriting Policy Create Homework Policy	PRSD - Review 3rd Cycle & Complete 4th Cycle Policy & Curriculum Review Taking Account of SENDO, Revised Curriculum and Clarifying Progression: Religious Education, Music, Art & Design

2006/07	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
ETHOS	Child Protection Review P7 Transfer Meeting/P4 Paired Reading Programme Settling in Parent Meetings/Group Meetings SEN Interviews (SEN+1 per term) Train Pupil Friends AGM/Reconstitution of Parents Association School Book Fair - Open Morning Halloween Disco & Christmas Party(PA)		Christmas Shows(P1-4)		Pastoral Care Action Plan P7 Transfer Interviews Exams, Reports and Parent Interviews SEN Annual Reviews Musical Afternoon Photographs World Book Day School Fair(PA) Treasure Hunt(PA) Fun Night(PA) Tournaments & Competitions: Rugby, Hockey, Soccer, Swimming, Oragh Fells, Library Quiz, S & T / INEX Challenge				P6 Transfer Meeting End of Year Reports P1 Induction Sports Day Special Assembly	
	Cross Community Contact with [redacted] Fitness Challenge for Charity Set up Breakfast Club After School Activities Community Visitors: Ministers, PSNI, NSPCC, Nurses, Year 8 Tutors				P6/7 Residential Trip School Trips (P1-7)					
LEARNING AND TEACHING	Numeracy Action Plan I CAN Development Plan Speech and Language Action Plan (P1) Speech and Language Project (P2) P7 IT Accreditation P5/6 Working Towards Monitoring & Evaluation of Standards of Achievement Target Setting/Benchmarking for 2006/2007 Review Physical Education Policy Organise Friday Swap utilising teachers' expertise (include French)				ICT Action Plan Review Structured Play Policy Review Science and Technology Policy	Order Resources	NFER P2-7 Suffolk (P3-7) etc: Test Analysis Annual Tests/Reports Update Pupil Profile BOA		Review Targets Set	
MANAGEMENT	PRSD - Second Cycle SDP-Staff consultation Implications of SENDO - Policy Review Work schedules for Staff [redacted] EPO Appointment of staff - training needs Budget Review/Redundancy Procedure Appliance Check - Disposal of Records Policy Create Management File - Timetabling, policies... Create Staff Handbook, Complaints Procedure, Induction Policy Review Prospectus/Governors' Report Revised Curriculum Stages 2 and 3 Training Staff Development: CZK Workshop New Managed Service(S4,6,8) Teacher Tutor Training(S4) Interactive Whiteboard (S4,6,8,9) Speech & Language Project(S4,6,8,9)				Phase 1 Installation of New Managed Service Revised Curriculum Stage 4 Addressing Diversity Developing Professional Collaboration(S4) Directorate in Education Assessing Children's Learning(S4) O.U.B.A/BSa Psychology Level 3(S4)				PRSD Review Second Cycle SDP - Whole School Evaluation Timetabling 07/08	Stage 5
EVALUATION										

Appendix E Example of parental consent letter

___/___/___

Dear _____,

As you know the school has supported my postgraduate study as part of the School Development Plan. I am now at the stage of writing up and would like to seek your permission to include in the thesis some of the interactions between pupils, and between pupils and myself that involve your child _____ when he/she was in Year 4 in _____ Primary School.

These are used to demonstrate how the children have progressed as writers and how I have understood how to support their progression.

All interactions used show the children in a very positive light. I use no images of the children and have changed their names to maintain anonymity. The data collected during lessons has been filed and kept under lock and key and is confidential. The data is only for use in research. As you know the children were always aware of my interest in their work and whenever I asked to talk with them I negotiated their agreement to discuss it with them.

Thank you for your support while your child was in my class and for agreeing to my request.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Sheena Herron

Year 4 Teacher

I _____ parent of _____ give Mrs Sheena Herron permission to include data as described above about my child in her research report.